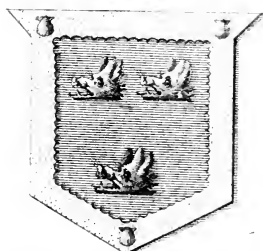


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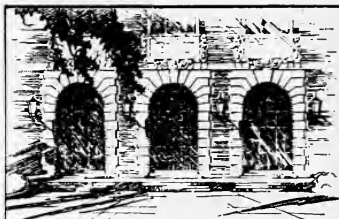
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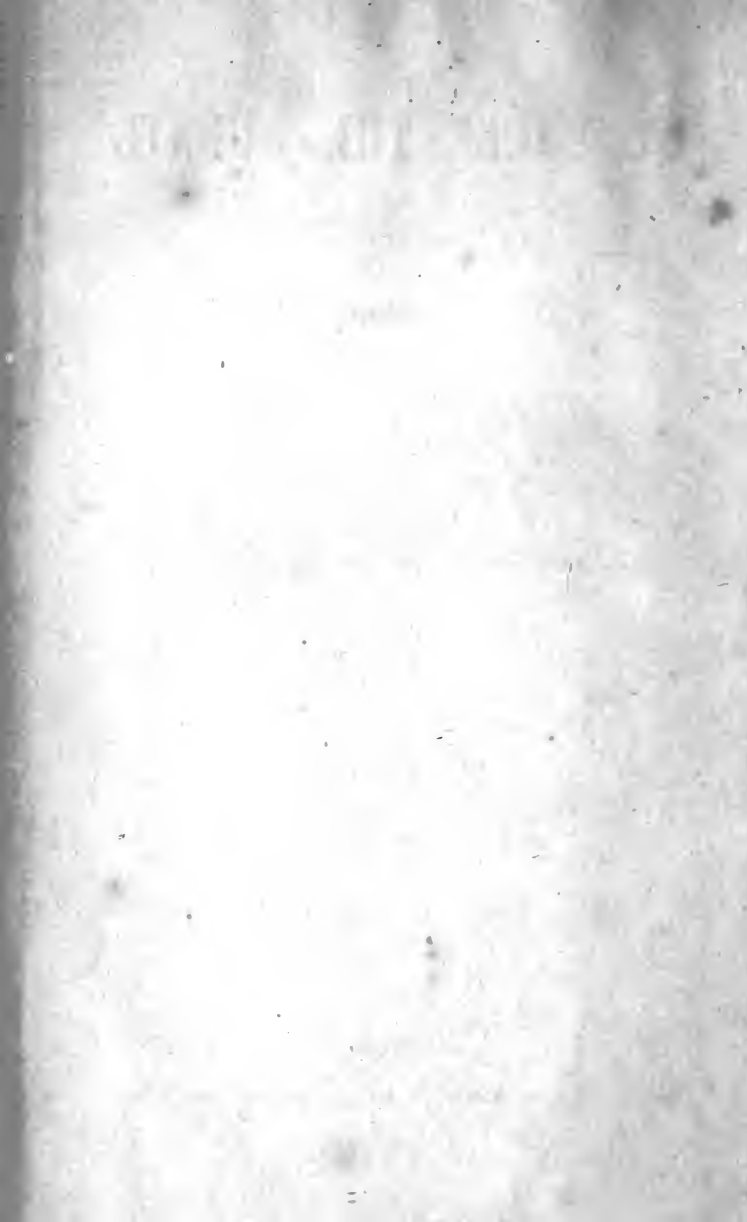
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MY UNCLE THE CURATE

A *Nobel*.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE BACHELOR OF THE ALBANY” AND “THE FALCON FAMILY.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 186, STRAND.

MDCCCLXIX.

C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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MY UNCLE THE CURATE.

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MY UNCLE THE CURATE.

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PARSONAGE DESERTED.

“ The place is now forsaken ;
The house is dark and silent ; on the threshold
Professors soon shall botanise, and within
Arachne weave unharmed her subtle web.”

NEW PLAY.

THE curate was at Redcross on some business of his sacred calling, when the vexatious incident took place which has just been recorded. On the previous evening he had taken his leave of Markham and Vivyan, who were only waiting for a favourable wind

to weigh anchor. Markham returned his cordial squeeze with one of nearly equal power. But Vivyan's more delicate hand long retained the sense of the lusty clergyman's too strenuous adieu.

Carry was not sorry that her husband was absent, when the threatening notice, like the fall of a bomb-shell, threw the whole household into confusion. Had he been at the parsonage at the time, he would probably have made confusion worse confounded, he was so much in the habit, not only of speaking the truth upon all occasions, but laying it on in the most energetic and unsparing manner.

The Circe sailed. The parting of lovers has been described so often, both in prose and rhyme, that we may safely leave the reader to imagine the parting-scene between Elizabeth Spenser and Frank Vivyan. But mingled with the grief of separation were tender solitudes for others, and concern for objects beyond themselves. Vivyan had become strongly attached to Mr. Spenser,

and felt acutely for the distress in which he saw that he was involved by seemingly uncontrollable circumstances. Elizabeth not only felt for her father, but for her brother still more deeply. Her anxiety for Sydney, indeed, had been extreme, ever since the change in Vivyan's fortunes (by preventing his return to Cambridge) had deprived her brother of the anticipated advantages of such a friend to introduce him to the University, and protect him from corrupting associations within its dangerous precincts. In all the ardour of her love for Vivyan, this tender care for Sydney never ceased to occupy her mind; and gladly would she have seen the plan of sending him to England over-ruled, and the advice of her uncle followed. But it was too late. Sydney was now bent upon going to Cambridge, and with a degree of eagerness which astonished, while it could not but please his family, to whom his principal reasons for wishing himself far removed were totally unknown. At the same time, it was not without regret he parted with

Frank Vivyan, whose ascendancy over him had been steadily increasing from the beginning of their acquaintance. Sydney embraced him affectionately before he sailed, and Elizabeth felt (as she witnessed their farewell) how completely it was in Vivyan's power to reform him completely, and how unfortunate it was that their intercourse was broken off thus prematurely. Carry Woodward had precisely the same feelings, and the last thing she said, as maternally she took leave of Frank, suffering him to kiss her mellow cheek, was that Elizabeth would feel his departure most, but that Sydney would be the greatest loser by it.

All that the amiable Vivyan could do for the brother of his betrothed he did with more than the zeal of friendship; he left a warm letter of introduction behind him to Mr. Peters, his own tutor, and a few other letters of judicious recommendation to such of his college acquaintances as he knew would make safe companions, and who he thought would, out of friendship for himself,

tolerate Sydney's deficiencies in manners and refinement.

The Circe sailed. The rector was called away to his wife's chamber, while in the act of shaking hands with Markham ; but Elizabeth, Mrs. Woodward, and Sydney, never left the little quay until the last inch of canvass disappeared, where the bend of the fiorde abruptly terminated the prospect seaward.

Elizabeth shed a few tears, and Carry wiped them away, as she led her back to the house, speaking as comfortably as she could ; and it was a hard task to speak so, for she was heavy at heart herself, and felt as if a long course of life's sunshine was about to be succeeded by a period of gloom and difficulty.

Elizabeth went to her room. It was still day-light. Carry called Billy Pitt, and directed him to go to the stables and order the black mare to be saddled, as well as his cousin Elizabeth's pony ; to have both put on board the boat, and to equip himself also

without delay, as she intended to ride home that evening. Billy Pitt was enchanted at the novelty of being his mother's escort and champion upon an equestrian expedition; and it never once occurred to him, when they were both mounted, after crossing the water, how much he resembled Tom Thumb squiring the princess Glumdalca. At a marvellous pace, for both the mare and her burthen, the journey was accomplished before the end of twilight.

The curate was engaged in supplying his pigs with clean straw, when his wife and his son trotted up to the gate, and he was not slow to divine that something extraordinary must have happened at the rectory. When he learned what it was, no words can express either the agitation of his mind, or the commotion of his frame. Carry never saw him so moved before, not even when the Duke of Wellington struck to Mr. O'Connell. He was somewhat calmer when he and she were together once more in his untidy study, but it was the mighty swell of the

sea on the day after a hurricane, and quite alarming enough to witness.

“A worthy shepherd,” he cried, “to abandon his flock in this fashion, on the very first cry of wolf. But Val was always a coward; a cowardly father, a cowardly husband, and now he is going to show himself a cowardly shepherd, and run away from his sheep. Cowed by a slip of paper pinned to a fig-tree ! I would as soon be cowed by that spider there on the ceiling. I should like to see Val with a grove of pikes at his throat, as I saw my own father in the '98 (I was not half as big as Billy at the time), since a scratch of a pen makes a woman of him. A man might as well be a woman at once as be the slave of a woman's fears and vagaries. Down, puss, down, down.” The great black cat was preparing to spring on his knee, as if it desired to mollify him. “Carry, Carry, much as I scorn a dastard in a red coat, I hold a dastard in a black one to be twice as contemptible.”

“Ten times,” responded his wife, bitterly,

and pacing up and down the study as rapidly as she could with the encumbrance of her riding-dress. She was almost as excited as her husband, though thinking more of the domestic unhappiness involved in her brother's determination, than of its effects upon the parish.

"It all comes of uxoriousness," continued the curate, as if summing up his invective, and still repelling the advances of the corpulent black cat.

"It comes of having married a silly, selfish woman," said Mrs. Woodward, "and it comes of cherishing a viper in the bosom of his family."

Carry then related Mr. Dawson's strange apparition and behaviour at the parsonage that morning; she could not but suspect that there was some mysterious alliance between Miss M'Cracken and that gentleman, particularly as Elizabeth was decidedly of opinion, from the negligence of his dress, that his scene with her was not a premeditated one.

For the first time in his life Hercules made no apology for Dawson ; his tenderness for his niece was extreme, and never did any man abhor more intensely than he did duplicity and dark practices of all kinds.

“ I don’t understand,” he said, after some moments of grim silence, “ how Dawson could possibly have passed through Redcross without my knowledge ; I’ll send Peter down to the inn to inquire whether he arrived by the night-coach.”

Peter brought word that Mr. Dawson had not been seen in the country for several weeks, and that, to the best of the inn-keeper’s belief, the honourable member for Rottenham was then in Dublin. The curate was Mr. Dawson’s friend no longer.

Now there commenced a ferment not commonly witnessed in a rural parish, and one of the singular features of it was the triple alliance of a Catholic priest, a Presbyterian minister, and a clergyman of the Established Church. Rare, in Ireland at least, was such a confederacy ; but people of all persuasions

were afflicted at the thought of losing Mr. Spenser, and Hercules had no difficulty whatsoever in rousing a spirit of determined opposition to his brother-in-law's cowardly resolve. He, who had all his life been railing at agitators, and denouncing aggregate meetings, was now a flaming agitator himself; and convened so vast an assemblage of the inhabitants of the parish that the meeting was held in the church-yard, no building in the town being large enough for the purpose. The chair (placed on the summit of a heap of tombs), was taken by Father Magrath; resolutions, prefaced by enthusiastic speeches, were unanimously passed, expressive of the most devoted attachment to Mr. Spenser, and declaring the determination of men of all sects and parties to support and protect him; a subscription was entered into and a reward offered for the discovery of the writer of the notice, which was ascribed with one accord either to private malice or wanton mischief; and, finally, an address to the rector was voted, which Father Magrath and the

Presbyterian divine undertook to prepare between them.

Mr. Spenser would have prevented all these proceedings, particularly the address, if it had been in his power; but the parochial feeling was too strong, and the expression of it placed the rector in a difficult position; so much so that Hercules was not without hope at one moment that his brother-in-law would return to his senses, take the true view of his duty, and retract the rash vow he had made to his wife.

"I am miserable, Hercules," said the rector, looking very unhappy indeed, and walking up and down his library, with his clasped hands sometimes behind and sometimes before him. A draft of the address lay on the table, having been sent to him before presentation, to enable him to prepare his answer.

"To be weak is to be miserable," said the vigorous curate, quoting the speech of one of Milton's angels.

"I have *promised* her, Hercules," said

Mr. Spenser, with melancholy emphasis on the word "promised."

"You are not the first man who has made a hasty promise," said Hercules, "but you know, Val, as well as I do, that in case of a foolish or a wrong engagement the moral obligation is to break and not to keep it."

"I'll go up to her," said the distracted rector, passing his hand over his pale and throbbing temples.

He went, and Hercules remained in the library, striding and straggling about, to the imminent danger of the busts, as usual. In about ten minutes the rector came down again, and entering the room with an excitement and vehemence such as he rarely exhibited, slapped the table with his hand, and exclaimed—

"It's her health, Hercules—it's her health—her health makes it indispensable."

Hercules saw that all was over, and rushed out of the library without uttering a word. Never did he walk at such a pace as he did back to Redcross that evening; never did

he look so truculent and unlike a minister of the gospel of peace.

Within a fortnight from that date the parsonage was deserted. The rector's library was consigned to the spiders, and there was nobody left to feed Elizabeth's robins, or talk playful politics with the echo from the hills.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SPENSERS IN TOWN.

“Matto in testa, Savio in bocca.”

ITALIAN PROVERB.

THE Spensers passed the autumn at a favourite watering-place in the neighbourhood of Dublin. The beginning of winter found them in the capital, tenants of a handsome house in one of the principal squares, looking at straight dull rows of brick houses, instead of picturesque mountain chains; the lazy Liffey and shrivelled Dodder in place of the foaming streams of Tyrconnell; miry streets for the clean, fresh, elastic heather, and the smoked sparrows of the city, for the white-winged sea-birds of the coast, or the broad-pinioned eagles of the hills.

Sydney had gone to Cambridge almost immediately after the removal of his family from Redcross. His father, with his characteristic negligence of every thing that did not immediately press, or pinch him, after one admirable letter, in which he laid down a course of study such as an Aristotle might have prescribed to an Alexander, soon dismissed him almost entirely from his thoughts. Elizabeth, however, wrote to him frequently, and when her letters either remained unanswered, or were hurriedly and curtly replied to, she amiably ascribed it to the intensity of her brother's application to mathematics.

However, she had a correspondent in Spain, who was not chargeable with neglecting her letters, or answering them too briefly.

Vivyan was forced to protract his absence far beyond the period within which he had hoped to conclude his business. The affairs of his deceased friend were involved in no small degree of complication between the law and the lawyers of two nations, and Frank had occasion to remark that all he

had heard of the romance of Spain was certainly borne out by his personal experience of the jurisprudence of that country. A voluminous correspondence passed between him and Elizabeth, and perhaps some of the letters were as prolix as the pleadings of any court of justice in the world.

The frivolous and selfish Mrs. Spenser was really reduced in strength when she arrived in town. The laudanum system was rapidly turning imaginary disorders into actual ones, and she suffered, besides, considerably by the fatigues of the journey. The novelty, however, of a town-house, and the excitement of new faces and acquaintances, produced a salutary re-action, and for some short time she was a marvellously amiable patient, her bed-room crowded with doctors, and her boudoir with fashionable gossips, alternately a college of physicians and a school for scandal. Some of the doctors, indeed, were first-rate gossips themselves, and probably did her as much good by their talk as by their tonics. They gave

her old complaints new names, they favoured her with several new disorders, consulted her palate as much as her pulse, and operated occasionally on her risible muscles.

Too much of the rector's money, more than he could afford, went in doctor's fees ; but he never complained, and often, indeed, declared that he found the leading members of the faculty any thing but grasping. Some, when they learned that he was a beneficed clergyman, driven from the country by the league against tithes, had too much good feeling to conspire with Captain Rock to fleece him. Others found in Mr. Spenser a most agreeable accession to Dublin society ; they enjoyed his acute and pleasant conversation, and declined to have their friendly visits counted and enumerated as medical calls. Those who were convivial were delighted to have a new man at their dinners, with such a fund as the rector possessed of the cleverest table-talk, for in that Mr. Spenser had few equals. He missed his library

chiefly, and used to say that, like Prospero, he was "a sot without his books." Though his social success in Dublin was complete, there was not much society that he greatly relished; and he could not but observe that he was much more prized and courted as a clergyman of rank, than for his wit or his literary eminence. There was also a certain narrowness and timidity about the Dublin circles which struck him as distinguishing society there remarkably from society in London. He thought he never saw people so absurdly afraid of ridicule, and so apt to suspect literary men of dealing in small satire and anonymous personalities, meannesses from which such men are particularly free. As Mr. Spenser (when he did indulge his humour) never intended to wound individuals, he was hurt at having the design imputed to him; but, indeed, he was accused of lampooning people of whose very existence he was ignorant until their preposterous charges reached his ear. Of course he never condescended to notice either such accusa-

tions or such accusers; he merely remarked in general that it was discreet to be dull in provincial capitals.

In one of his letters to Carry Woodward he observed, speaking on this subject, that "small satire is like small cutlery, and those who use such weapons are more likely to wound themselves than seriously hurt others. Satire ought to be a sword and not a pen-knife."

Very soon after his arrival at the seat of government, he was appointed, through his wife's little ambitious intrigues, one of the Lord-Lieutenant's chaplains, an honour he was not solicitous of; it gave him some trouble and no emolument; he had to preach for the mimic court, and dine at trumpet-dinners, and unfortunately the dinners were not as concise as his sermons.

"I am not fond of a diffuse dinner any more than of a diffuse discourse; I like to dine *laconically*, as Marshal Turenne used to say," he remarked one day, talking in the street to his friend Sir Florus Bloomfield, an

eminent surgeon and accomplished member not only of his profession, but of society.

“Dine with me in that fashion to-morrow at seven,” said the courtly baronet, and cantered away to perform one of his brilliant operations. Sir Florus did every thing brilliantly, lectured, operated, talked, dressed, and rode. Nay, he sometimes hunted, and even rode a steeple-chase, but that was perhaps to encourage and give *éclat* to amusements, of which the members of the surgical profession are the natural and proper patrons. At least Mr. Spenser used to say so.

The dinner at Sir Florus’s proved far more Attic than Laconic. Several distinguished guests had been invited to meet the rector, who made on that day some valuable additions to his list of friends. Two men particularly pleased him. The first was a lawyer by profession, a demagogue by necessity, and a poet and orator by nature; the warmest of friends, the most attractive of companions; a mind all fancy and fire; a heart all frankness and goodnature; Catholic in genius as in creed. The fortunes of his

country had determined his career. He started at a time when it was patriotic to be turbulent. But his was a turbulence embellished by wit and illumined by eloquence ; born of just discontent, and extinguished by the achievement of its high objects. He generously coveted, and fairly won, the first privileges and honours of the constitution ; forced his way into parliament to adorn, not to shake the empire ; serving Ireland best by making Irish talents useful, and Irish worth conspicuous in his person.

The other was Sir Charles Freeman, a physician, profoundly versed in the science and learning of his humane profession, though he did not prosecute it as a source of income. His wit resembled Mr. Spenser's, at once playful and scholarlike, drawn from every sparkling fount in ancient or modern letters. Probably no man in his time had hived up so much elegant and curious knowledge, or had his infinite reading so much at command. With French literature he was as familiar as the best educated Frenchman, and in Greek learning he was altogether unrivalled. He

was an equally acute and good-natured observer of manners ; a brilliant essayist, and a politician whose liberality was not adhesion to party, but a deduction from his studies, and a confidence in moral truth. Yet his enlightenment and his wit were but a small part of his value ; he was the humanest, simplest, and worthiest of men, though his virtues, no more than his talents, won for him in Ireland the consideration they deserved. The jealousies and bigotries were too strong for him. He required another sphere, a higher and wider stage, and a more judicious and magnanimous society. It was his fortune, some years after the period when Mr. Spenser made his acquaintance, to live admired and loved, and to die honoured and lamented, by the statesmen, the wits, poets, and philosophers, of the metropolis of England and the world.

The company of such men, and a few others of kindred character and genius, was delightful to the rector, and had his wife allowed him to enjoy more of it, he might easily have been reconciled to life in

Dublin. But Mrs. Spenser was not less perverse in town than country, and Elizabeth could not help thinking that she made it a point to be taken ill, when her husband was invited to some particularly agreeable dinner.

In the mornings he walked or rode about a good deal with his daughters, when the weather was not too atrocious. They visited all that was sight-worthy in the city, and it took no very long time to complete the survey. There were lions enough, in the curate's sense of the word, but very few in its more popular meaning. A court without nobility, an exchange without merchants, a theatre without the drama, and a zoological garden without a wild beast. So Mr. Spenser described the Irish capital in a letter to his curate, but his wife had been troublesome in the morning, and perhaps there was more gall in his ink than usual. When she was quiet and well-behaved, he took a different view of things, and sometimes gave a very agreeable picture of life in Dublin.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PERSECUTIONS.

“ Had I been seized by a hungry lion,
I would have been a breakfast to the beast ;
Rather than have false Proteus rescue me,
O heaven be judge, how I love Valentine,
Whose life’s as tender to me as my soul ;
And full as much (for more there cannot be),
I do detest false, perjur’d Proteus :
Therefore be gone, solicit me no more.”

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

ELIZABETH hoped, as parliament was now sitting, that Mr. Dawson would forget a subject so insignificant as herself in the cares of statesmanship and the toils of legislation, but whether it was that the talents of that gentleman were not decidedly parliamentary, or that his feelings towards Miss Spenser overpowered his sense of public duty, or that

there was room enough in his great capacity for the affairs of the heart as well as those of the nation, certain it was that he spent more of his time in Dublin than was consistent with the duties he had to discharge at Westminster.

The rector had written him a sharp letter immediately after the incident of the Signal Rock, but it was not sharp enough, and it wanted that tone of decision which Mrs. Woodward would have given it, and which might have shown Dawson once for all the utter folly of his attentions to Miss Spenser. The consequence was, that an opening was left for a letter of explanation and apology, which Mr. Spenser had the weakness to reply to in such gentle and forgiving terms that Dawson's position was rather improved than injured by the result of the whole transaction. But his success with Mrs. Spenser was still more complete. He had written, the reader will recollect, a letter to the government, in which, with the utmost indelicacy, he had introduced Mrs. Spenser's

name, extolling her in the most fulsome language as another Eleanora, or Mrs. Killigrew. Miss M'Cracken had undertaken to procure a copy of this state-paper through a brother of Peacock's, who had some appointment at the castle, but she over-rated her corrupt influence, and this drove Dawson to devise a still cleverer way of gaining his object. He prevailed on one of his parliamentary associates to move for copies of papers and correspondence connected with the anti-tithe agitation, shaping the motion so that his own letter must necessarily be produced amongst the other documents. It succeeded to admiration. The returns were made, printed in a blue book, published in the newspapers, and Mrs. Spenser's graces and virtues became part of the public records of the kingdom.

The rector himself, uxorious as he was, had no notion what a divine helpmate he had, until, to his amazement, he read her character in the newspapers, extracted from the blue book; and as to the lady herself, not

even in the mirror of Miss M'Cracken's most abject and daring flattery, had she ever seen herself arrayed in such a panoply of charms. You may conceive how high Dawson stood in her opinion after this. Lucy assured her mistress that she had read Lord Chesterfield's letters, and thought Mr. Dawson's worth them all put together, "it was not only so very beautiful, but so very true."

Still nothing but the most enormous personal conceit could have urged him to persevere in addresses which Elizabeth had upon all occasions repelled with the utmost coldness. Dawson's vanity was more than mere satisfaction with himself; it amounted to admiration and rapture. When he had accomplished himself from top to toe in what he considered, or what tailors, hatters, and hair-dressers assured him was the acme of fashion—when he was mounted on a showy horse, or seated in a dashing cab—he thought himself the most redoubtable lady-killer; and when, to crown all, he recollected that he was a public character and a member of

parliament, he believed that nothing in female form, however beautiful, wealthy, or exalted, could possibly resist him.

One day Elizabeth had spent the morning with her friends, the Ramsdens, who lived in a neighbouring street. A servant attended her home. Pacing up and down before the door was a groom in a handsome livery, mounted on a superb horse, and leading another nearly as fine. Not having paid much attention to such matters, she concluded that Sir Florus Bloomfield was visiting Mrs. Spenser, and, as his company was always agreeable, instead of going to her own room, she proceeded to her step-mother's. Just as she reached the door, Rebecca was coming out; a glimpse into the interior was thus afforded, and that glimpse revealed Mr. Dudley Dawson. Miss Spenser recoiled, as if she had inadvertently approached the mouth of a dragon's den, and flew on tip-toe to her own apartment. She had not been there many moments, when Miss M'Cracken came tapping, and said that Mrs. Spenser desired to see her.

Elizabeth excused herself, saying (which was indeed the truth) that she was changing her dress, and Lucy went away disappointed, to give a still greater disappointment to Mr. Dawson.

Mrs. Spenser had given Dawson the most cordial reception imaginable. In return for his adulation of herself, she loaded him with compliments, congratulations, expressions of gratitude, and civil speeches of all kinds. She would never forget his kindness ; she lamented that her health had prevented her from seeing more of him in the country, she thought his waistcoat the handsomest of the season, asked him for franks, and hoped to see him frequently, as long as he remained in town.

While the excited invalid was making this long oration, Miss M'Cracken was sitting at a window with a devout book in her hand, looking meek as a nun, but now and then directing furtive glances at the senator, expressive of her triumph in the success of their schemes. What followed almost threw her

into ecstasies. The rector entered as Dawson was taking leave. A sudden thought struck Mrs. Spenser.

“Would Mr. Dawson, if he happened not to be engaged—would he kindly return to dinner?”

Mr. Spenser had, of course, no alternative but to concur in the request, but Dawson was to dine that day with the Lord Lieutenant. “Happy condition of vice-regal state,” thought the rector.

“To-morrow?” Mr. Dawson was only too proud and too happy to consent.

Mr. Spenser pitied the viceroy for having to entertain such a man as Dudley, but he ought to have rather compassionated his daughter, who had not the formalities and ceremony of the Castle to protect her against a repulsive guest. The state that accompanies great employments is not necessary merely to make them imposing in the eyes of the vulgar; it is absolutely essential to defend those who fill them from the importunities, familiarities, and thousand indeco-

runs of scores of persons, who, unless kept back by troops of aides-de-camps and ushers, would make the service of the public in high offices an intolerable burthen. As to Dawson, he was a man to be received with a file of battle-axe and the whole college of heralds, Ulster, Cork, and Athlone pursuivant.

The dreaded day came and went, with less pain to Elizabeth, however, than she could have anticipated, but unluckily with more satisfaction also to Dawson than he had hoped for. Elizabeth received him with cold civility, but being under the impression that he was aware of her engagement to Vivyan (with which, however, Miss M'Cracken had not acquainted him), her manner was less freezing than it would otherwise have been, and his vanity, of course, interpreted this negative symptom as a favourable one.

The next day Dawson paid a visit ; it was expected and endured.

On the following evening Elizabeth went to the theatre with her relations, the Ramsdens. The greatest actor of the age was

playing Macbeth. In the interval between the first and second act, she happened just to turn her head round for a moment to make a remark to one of the friends in whose party she was, when the door of the box opened, and Dawson appeared, blazing in gold chains, gilt buttons, and pink velvet. He bowed, and she could not but return the salute. There was a vacant place in the box; he closed the door and took possession of it in such a flourishing way as to attract general attention. The great drama went on, but Macbeth and Macready no longer engrossed Elizabeth's mind. She never could cease thinking of the offensive personage behind her.

“Hence, horrible shadow!”

The words seemed strangely applicable to her situation, but unfortunately Dawson was no “unreal mockery.” Before the play was over, a gentleman in the row immediately behind her, but not of her party, quitted the box. Dawson instantly seized the vacant post, and then she thought the green curtain

would never fall. His criticisms, however, amused her friends, if they disgusted her. Every second word was either gorgeous, or splendid, or magnificent, or tremendous. "Thrilling," too, was a favourite phrase of his. Something was always thrilling Dawson, he was of such an extremely sensitive constitution. Scotland was not more relieved than Miss Spenser was, when the sword of Macduff concluded the tragedy. But she was not quite delivered from Dawson yet ; he assisted her in shawling, and intrusively offered her his arm to conduct her to the carriage. She took the arm of one of her cousins, but Dawson followed her, making odious attempts to be agreeable, hoping she would not catch cold, and wondering how, after witnessing such stupendous acting, any one could remain to see a paltry after-piece. Directly, however, the Ramsden's carriage drove off, our man of such delicate taste and refinement returned to the house ; sought out a knot of his friends, and after laughing vociferously at a low farce, passed the residue

of the night in the pleasures of loo and lobsters.

Now, indeed, scarcely a day passed without Elizabeth experiencing more or less annoyance from the same gentleman. She underwent nearly the same persecution that another lady, more known to the world, was doomed to undergo some years afterwards from another Lothario of the emerald isle. If Elizabeth walked in the squares, with the Ramsdens, or any of her female friends, Dawson seldom failed to inflict himself upon them. If she went shopping, she was pounced on in the same manner. At concerts and other public places, there was no protection from him, and his visits to Mrs. Spenser were now events of almost daily occurrence. Dawson gave her all his franks, and was so obliging as to offer to receive all the letters of the family, which, if sent under cover to him, would thus come to them free of postage. Of this privilege, however, Elizabeth did not avail herself, but her step-mother made use of it liberally, and made the rector do so too.

Mr. Spenser, however, had the misfortune accidentally to involve himself at this time much deeper with Dawson than by the mere acceptance of a few franks. He had taken a first-class house, furnished in the handsomest manner, and this, with the increased expenses of a town residence, the outlay at his daughter's wedding, and the necessary advances to Sydney, was now beginning to press so heavily on his means, that he was under the necessity of negotiating a loan of five hundred pounds. With three hundred of this sum his bookseller, more generously than prudently, accommodated him, and he found it no easy matter (having but few friends in Dublin) to raise the remainder. At length he heard of an obscure solicitor, by whom matters of this kind were adroitly and confidentially managed, and to this gentleman he repaired for assistance. It turned out that this person was Dawson's attorney, and Dawson was actually in his office when a clerk entered and informed the man of the law that the Reverend Mr. Spenser desired to

see him. Sharkey and Dawson whispered, and Dawson stepped into a very small closet behind the attorney's chair, where he was almost stifled with old coats, boots, and musty parchments, but could hear what went on in the office as well as if he had stood his ground like an honest man. When Dawson heard the rector state his little embarrassments, how deeply it affected him in his hole must be left to the reader to imagine. Mr. Sharkey said what low money-jobbers always say upon such occasions; talked of the times, the scarcity of money, (with which the market then chanced to be actually glutted), but concluded by promising to see what could be done, and requesting the rector to call again in a few days. The clergyman departed, and the senator emerged, the former deeply feeling the indignity to which his necessities reduced him, the latter actually vain of having wantonly played the part of a knave.

“Will you lend the money, Dud?” asked the attorney, who was Dawson's boon companion and bosom friend. He was a small

man, with a red face and sharp features, but not as sharp as his practice. In the hall of the Four Courts he was considered a dandy, and when he was engaged in any particularly dirty business, he invariably wore canary gloves and a white waistcoat.

"You best know whether I can or not," replied Dawson; "but there's not a man living, Bob, to whom I'd rather lend a couple of hundred pounds, if I had it. You know who he is, don't you?"

"To be sure I do—the father of the girl you're after," said Sharkey.

"The same," said Dawson.

"I don't think you'll ever get her, Dud."

"By —— I will, as sure as I'm member for Rottenham. But I tell you what it is, Bob. I think it would do me no harm to be in her papa's books for the two hundred."

"Upon my sowl, Dud, it's the very thing would do the business for you. And didn't you save her life?"

"But about the money," said Dawson.

"Why, you haven't it, and that's all about

it," said the attorney, and, lowering his voice, added with a facetious grin, "are there any more pictures by the ould masters at the castle, Dud?"

"By —, Bob," whispered Dawson, elate at the thought of his management of the affair alluded to, "that was the cleverest job I ever did."

"But, tell me, Dud," the attorney lowered his voice again, and still more than before, "what's become of the Major and Thomson?"

"The Major's gone abroad," said Dawson.

"For seven years?" said Sharkey.

"Not so bad," said the other, "but he got wild about the repeal of the union, and he thought he could serve the question in New York as well as in ould Ireland."

"And you didn't discourage him," said the attorney.

"No," answered the M.P., "but, touching the money—is there no way?"

Mr. Sharkey now looked very deliberative, and his eyes corresponded with Dawson's for several moments, with that sort of

silent but most intelligible language which it is a mistake to think confined to the interviews of swains and shepherdesses. It can take place just as well on two stools in an attorney's dingy office, overhung with cobwebbed papers, as upon banks of violets, under canopies of roses and eglantine.

"It just occurs to me," said the attorney, breaking this eloquent silence first, "that there's a client of mine who is anxious to get a poor boy of his something or other in the public service—any thing that's going worth a hundred a-year, or even less, but you see the poor fellow has nobody to ask for him, though I think he'd come down with two or three hundred pounds, if the thing could be managed in an honourable way."

Dawson looked as roguish as he well could look, but did not answer for a moment or two.

"Confidential, Bob," he said at length.

"Honour bright, Dud."

Dawson took his hat, reminded his legal adviser of an appointment for the night, and went his way. He was seen a good deal for

a few days about the Castle, swaggering in the anti-room, or wriggling in the corridors. What success he had is unknown, or what place he got for the son of Sharkey's client; but the attorney managed in the course of the week to accommodate the rector with the sum he required, securing a pretty per centage for himself, and concealing the name of the real lender, Dawson being too delicate to appear in the transaction, though he put the rector's acceptances into his pocket.

Dawson would have been a happy man had all the sex been as devoted to him as Miss M'Cracken, but tenderly as she watched over his interests, she was more on the *qui-vive* about her own, and as just about this time she thought it prudent to bring matters with Peacock (the amorous exciseman) to a matrimonial crisis, she judged it also to be only discreet to get him another shove forward in life.

Mr. Spenser continued to take a Donegal newspaper, called the *Tyrconnell Mercury*, and it happened one morning that Lucy,

glancing over the columns of this rural journal, saw recorded amongst other news the promotion of the post-master of Redcross to the like office in the city of Cork. The announcement at first made no impression on her mind, but in the course of the day the thought flashed across it, that the office of post-master would suit her lover, and that through Dawson's exertions it might not be an unattainable object. At first she found the M.P. a little impracticable. He had been using his influence freely of late, and had a hundred more applicants for places on his list than he had the least chance of providing for, though not a few of them were ready to accept any office, however mean, at any salary, however moderate, in any part of the world, no matter how distant or pestilential.

Dawson, one Sunday afternoon, did a very unusual thing—a thing he had never done before on the same day, and at the same hour—he went to church. In the morning

he had received the following short note from Miss M'Cracken :—

“Dear Mr. Dawson,

“Miss S—— will be at the —— chapel, this evening.

“Your obliged and devoted,

“L. M'C.”

Dawson attended punctually, but though Elizabeth was there, as the female spy had correctly informed him, he might as well have been losing his time under the walls of the most jealous harem in the East, trying to get a glimpse at the Fatimas, and Zobeides. Miss Spenser was with her father and the Ramsdens, in a private pew, well pavilioned about with curtains, and inaccessible to strangers, even with the silver key, which Dawson would gladly have applied to the lock. Never was a mind less in unison with the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving than his was, as he dodged about the aisles and galleries, in the dim religious lamp-light,

seeking a position, whence seen or unseen, he might command at least a view of the pure girl, with whom he fancied himself in love, in his absolute ignorance of what love is.

After he had stood some time, like Satan amongst "the sons of God," his frivolous design completely baffled by the crimson hangings of the pew where Elizabeth was ensconced, he bethought himself that he was wasting his evening with unprofitable hypocrisy, and was stealing out of the church to resort to the tavern, just as a sacred song was given out to be sung by the congregation. The voices were almost all female, and one drew general attention, not merely by its real sweetness, but by the impassioned energy with which it lifted the note of praise far higher than any other voice that was raised upon the occasion. In the midst of the hymn that divine voice ceased abruptly, and the people looked about them, wondering what could have struck it dumb. But the surprise did not extend to Dawson, who recognised

the tones of an instrument of his own, and perfectly well understood that Miss M'Cracken was about to sacrifice the sermon for a chat with him in the vestibule. It was exactly so. She came out immediately after him, wriggling through the crowd on tip-toe, everybody thinking that the girl with the enchanting voice was overpowered by the heat, and in want of fresh air. The sermon, that night, was delivered by one of the most celebrated preachers of the time, and even the pew-openers and beadies pressed into the aisles to hear him, leaving the vestibule deserted, so that our worthy pair had it all to themselves. They sat down together on a wooden form that was there, and were not much disturbed, on the whole, by the distant thunders of the pulpit.

Their remarks on the service were not edifying, and shall, therefore, be omitted. Lucy was sorely grieved at Dawson's disappointment, and said many harsh things of the pew system, and on the exclusiveness of crimson velvet curtains. No such things

were allowed in Scotland ; they would not be tolerated, she said, in the Church that she belonged to ; and Dawson paid her a just compliment upon her liberality in attending the services of the English Church, though born and bred a Presbyterian. He was then about to leave her, (not wishing her, perhaps, to lose the sermon), when, after sundry little hesitations, and beatings about the bush, she brought the subject of her own little fortunes and her Edward's promotion on the tapis.

"The post-office at Redcross is a very snug thing, Lucy," said the senator, musingly and dubiously.

"It would suit Edward and me so very nicely," said the amiable girl, in her most persuasive tones.

"Well, Lucy," said Dawson, "suppose you were post-mistress, would you take great care of the Castle-Dawson bag ? would you take particular care of my letters and newspapers ?"

Lucy thought she might make herself useful in the situation, if she was appointed

to it. The member of parliament thought so too, though neither he nor she stated precisely in what way the usefulness was to be shown. There are some things which it is not either pleasant or politic to speak of with precision even in the most confidential communications.

“Well,” said Dawson, rising, “you are a jewel of a girl, Lucy, and to-morrow I’ll see what can be done ; but do not be too sanguine. I am by no means confident of carrying the point.”

It was raining when they looked out of the porch of the edifice, which they had thus been desecrating, into the gloomy street, but Dawson had an umbrella and proposed to conduct Lucy home. This, however, she declined, having some curiosity, she said, to hear a little of the sermon ; and besides, she just made the discovery that she had left her hymn-book behind her. They parted, however, affectionately, he braving the elements out of doors ; she, with still greater hardihood, venturing back into the house

where the worship of God was still going on.

The rector walked home from church that evening, having resigned his seat in the carriage to a lady. As he moved along, keeping the most sheltered side of the street, and musing on the arrangements for his daughter's wedding, which was to take place in a few days, a tall young man, who was walking rapidly, passed him, and it struck Mr. Spenser immediately that he bore a striking resemblance to George Markham.

He instantly turned, and overtook him; it was indeed Markham, but the pleasure of the meeting seemed to be all on the rector's side, for when Mr. Spenser informed him where he was quartered, and hoped to see him at his house, George declined, with obvious embarrassment, and pleaded the urgency of the affairs which had brought him over, and the very limited time he had at his disposal while he remained in Ireland. They spoke of Vivyan, but Markham had no news of a recent date to give of his friend,

and upon this, as upon other subjects, he was strangely uncommunicative, though the few words he did exchange with Mr. Spenser were not unfriendly, and at parting he shook his hand, and thanked him with warmth for his past and his proffered hospitality.

Mr. Spenser thought there was something strange in all this, but ascribed it to the pre-occupation of the young man's mind with the urgent affairs he had spoken of, and continued his walk home, in doubt whether to blame himself or not for having omitted to invite Markham to assist at Arabella's marriage.

Elizabeth, however, was extremely pained and perplexed when she heard from her father what had occurred ; she remembered what a frank, joyous fellow George had been at Redcross ; and found it difficult to avoid the thought that Vivyan must be connected in some way or another with the circumstances, whatever they were, which had brought his friend back to Ireland.

“ Did he ask for the Woodward’s ? ” she inquired, with anxiety.

“No,” replied her father.

This she thought very unaccountable, Markham having taken such a prodigious fancy to her uncle : it looked like either profound absorption in business, or as if, after all, there was no great solidity in the attachments which George formed yachting.

A letter from Vivyan, however, arrived the next morning, all tenderness and eloquence, as usual, and Elizabeth, having the cares of a wedding on her shoulders, thought little more of Markham, his business, or his abstraction.

The first event of any consequence that took place in Dublin was Arabella Spenser's marriage, and it was as heavy an affair of the kind as was ever transacted at St. George's, Hanover Square, or St. Peter's, in Dublin. Indeed, it only deserves to be chronicled as an illustration of Arabella's littleness and her uncle's magnanimity. It had been considered a settled point that the curate was to perform the ceremony, and we may remember that the rector had advertised him to

keep himself in readiness to discharge that interesting duty, when called upon. In fact, Hercules had ordered a new coat, (not an iron-gray, but an actual black one,) and had been very urgent and impatient with his tailor about it. "Do be patient, my dear," Carry said more than once, "recollect what a time it must take to make a coat for *you*." The tailor, however, kept his engagement better than other people did. About a week before the wedding, it was decided that no ecclesiastic under the rank of a bishop would answer to unite so important a personage as Lieutenant-Colonel Dabzac in the bonds of matrimony with Miss Spenser, and as the bishop of one of the northern sees was a connexion of the bridegroom, the bride had a shabby pretext for cashiering her uncle the curate. The rector was excessively mortified and distressed, and indeed he was secretly more grieved than he owned to any body at the whole of his daughter's conduct in relation to her marriage ; she showed such little concern at leaving her

father's roof, and such a precipitate eagerness to identify herself with her husband's family and connexions. As to Mrs. Woodward, though very indignant, she knew her niece's character too well to be much surprised at her paltry conduct, so she was not sorry to find in the illness of one of her children an excuse for not being present at the wedding. Hercules, however, made it a point to go up to town, and he could not have more effectually revenged himself on Arabella, had such been his wish, for the curate's exterior was unquestionably ill-calculated to adorn a "marriage à la mode." The provincial tailor had done him more justice in the quantity of cloth than in the elegance of his cut. His shoes were very new, but made for the bogs, rather than the carpet; and as for the delicate white gloves with which he was duly presented, after a single glance of curiosity and contempt, he thrust them into his pocket for Carry, with grave doubts whether they were not much too small for her plump hand as well as his own. Indeed, it

was no easy matter to adapt the curate to a drawing-room at any time; and now that he was left to his own devices, with no good wife to look after his toilette, the more he studied to be a *beau*, the more extraordinary was the figure he cut. Even Elizabeth herself could not help wishing that he had not got his hair curled so egregiously, and that he had seen the impropriety of putting cambric enough into his cravat to make a surplice. There were no fewer than five lieutenant-colonels (either relatives or friends of Dabzac's) present at the wedding. There were also old Mrs. Dabzac and her sister, old Mrs. Loquax, Lord and Lady Brabble, Mr. and Mrs. Pepper, several young Peppers, and a certain angelical Miss Vallancey, all of the Dabzac faction. The Spensers were inferior in number, but in number only. There was the rector himself and his daughter, the good curate (well worth an army of the colonels), the Ramsdens (excellent people, related to the Spensers), Sir Florus Bloomfield, and last and least of all, little Mr. Trundle,

in full feather, and chattering at the very steps of the altar about Loch Swilly and the thirty millions. Mr. Trundle had been invited by both parties, being not only agent to Dabzac, but also to Lord Bonham, Mr. Spenser's friend and patron.

If Hercules was snubbed at breakfast by some of the company, he was compensated in some measure by the honour of an introduction to the bishop, who kindly shook his hand, and graciously said that he had heard of Mr. Woodward, and was happy to have the opportunity of making his acquaintance. Hercules was pleased to be thus noticed by one of the heads of the Church, and indeed the prelate was a man by whom it was almost promotion to be praised, for his life was as spotless as his lawn, and the lustre of his virtues outshone his mitre.

On the evening of the wedding-day the curate returned to his parish, having been absent from his pastoral duties only three days. He had not been in Dublin for ten years before, and it was a sore grief to him

not to have had a single jolly night with his friend Tom Beamish. He breakfasted, however, with Tom one morning, and was accompanied by Elizabeth, whose beauty and affability made such a sensation in the University that to this day her visit to it is matter of table-talk at College commons. Hercules showed her the chambers which he had occupied himself when a scholar ; conducted her to the hall, and pointed out the precise spot where the illustrious Doctor Prior had examined him in Thucydides ; led her to the academic kitchen, and explained the machinery by which one fire roasted innumerable legs of mutton ; from thence to the buttery, where he and Beamish joked all their jokes, and punned all their puns over again, enormously exaggerating their old potations of October, while Miss Spenser unaffectedly laughed with them, although far from understanding one-half of their quips and quiddities. She was greatly pleased, on the whole, with her reception in the College of her royal namesake ; the only

fault she found with it was that it was not sufficiently national, but her uncle luminously explained to her, as they walked home, that to admit a single Catholic on the foundation would be tantamount to placing a barrel of gunpowder under it, and blowing the establishment into the air.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MARKHAM REVISITS THE PARSONAGE.

“ Revisit, say you ?

Who ever visited the same mansion twice ?

The walls remain, the roof, the gables, chimneys ;

The mason’s work will stand a century,

But ’tis not stone and mortar makes the house,

The bricks, or timber, but the hearts and faces,

And these change every day and every hour.”

NEW PLAY.

ALMOST immediately after the curate’s return home, he went to reside at the parsonage, which was a central point in the parish, whereas the town of Redcross was situated on the edge of it, bordering on Mr. Oliver’s benefice. Hercules did not feel half so comfortable as if he had been in his own dear disorderly old house, for he was obliged to forego a number of his little innocent free-

doms and enjoyments; he was no longer in a position to repel the invasions of housemaids; the sweeping-brush now swept all before it, and the Pope's head was too strong for him, sturdy Protestant as he was. Carry now kept him in reasonable order; only she could not prevent him from sometimes clapping his oil-skin head-piece on the bust of Curran in the library, the worst of which was that Billy Pitt followed the paternal example, and took the same liberty with the bust of Fox, who, in Billy's straw hat and green ribbons, looked like a superannuated Colin, or an Alexis of sixty.

Carry had just been talking one morning of writing to her friends in Dublin, when the curate was called out to speak to a shopkeeper of Redcross, who had come over the water to inform him that he thought he had discovered a clue which might possibly lead to the detection of the robbery of the titheproctor. The clue consisted in a bank-note for five pounds, on one corner of which the shopkeeper had recognised a mark, which

he thought exceedingly like Mr. Randy Maguire's signature. There was also a date immediately under, and apparently in the same cramped hand. The curate was not familiar enough with the proctor's writing to give an opinion; but Randy was sent for, and not only identified the initials and the date, but was enabled by the latter to pronounce the note to be one of those which he had received at Branagan's house from a tenant of Mr. Vivyan. Hercules hurried back to Carry with the joyful news of the probable discovery of the criminals, in consequence of this occurrence; and then, taking the shopkeeper and Maguire with him, proceeded to Redcross to prosecute the inquiry. The shopkeeper had a dispute with his wife as to the quarter from which they had received the note. He maintained it was from a grazier in the neighbourhood; the wife was positive it had been received from Amby Hogg, the sexton, who has been already honourably mentioned in the course of our story.

“Well,” said Hercules, “let us go to Amby first.”

Amby was a vain little tradesman, who wished to be thought more familiar with considerable sums of money than in fact he was, so he talked of ascertaining the hand from which any particular note came to his as a thing not to be done.

“I’m happy to find you receive so many of them, Amby,” said the curate.

“It would be a bad business, your reverence,” replied the sexton, “if five-pound notes were as scarce as green peas at Christmas.”

“They’re not quite as plenty, howsomdever, as blackberries at Michaelmas,” muttered the other shopkeeper, not pleased at his fellow-townsmen’s ostentation of wealth.

While these observations were passing backwards and forwards, Amby Hogg’s daughter, a quiet but smart little girl of about fourteen, who kept his shop, and indeed made the most of his money for him, gave her father sundry winks and plucks by

the coat, which the curate perceived sooner than the sexton himself did.

“Your daughter has got something to say to you,” said Hercules. “Perhaps she may be able to jog your memory, Amby.”

Amby followed the girl into a little parlour behind the shop, where much of the profits of the trade were drank in toddy by himself, and in tea and toddy by his wife. In a moment he returned, and, with a mysterious face, said to the clergyman.

“Will your reverence step this way?”

Amby took the curate into the inner room, and there informed him that his daughter said the note in question had been received from Mr. Sydney Spenser.

“Why make a mystery of that?” said Hercules; “we must only try to find out how it came into my nephew’s possession.”

The curate was returning to the shop, when Amby held him back, and, in a low voice, advised him not to mention his nephew’s name in connexion with the business.

This still more surprised Hercules, and he

desired to know why Amby recommended such reserve.

"When I'm alone with your reverence, I'll tell you my maning," said Amby.

The curate was at a loss what to say to the other shopkeeper, who stood outside, but Amby's invention was quicker.

"Tell him," said he, "just nothing at all about it; only keep the bank-note in your own possession."

"It's a serious thing," said the considerate Hercules, "to detain so large a sum of money from a poor fellow like him."

"Then your reverence must only give him another note in place of it," said the sexton, flippantly.

Never was the ascendancy of moral dignity over mere pecuniary consequence more conspicuous than it was in the aspect of Mr. Woodward, as calmly and silently it intimated the fact, that it was entirely out of his power to adopt Mr. Hogg's last suggestion.

"I'll see if I've got as much in the till, myself," replied Amby, but not as conceitedly

as he would have said it, if his little pride of purse had not been rebuked by the high-minded simplicity with which the man of education, and the minister of the gospel, had confessed how little he possessed of the world's wealth.

However, Amby went to his treasury, and produced the required sum of money, without seeming to have much trouble in making it up. The sexton of Redcross was a richer man than the curate!

As soon as they were alone together, Amby made a statement which wounded Mr. Woodward to the soul. Sydney, on leaving Redcross, had left several unsettled accounts behind him. Some of his debts (amongst others, that to Amby himself) he had discharged; but by so doing he only exasperated those creditors whose demands he left entirely unsatisfied, and nothing, in fact, but a feeling of delicacy towards the rector (particularly as he was parting from them under painful circumstances) kept them making a noise about their accounts, and

calling on Mr. Spenser to settle them. Imagine the feelings of the honest and humane uncle, when he heard that in some instances his nephew had actually borrowed small sums of money, on sundry pretences, from the poor shopkeepers, and that these sums had not been repaid. He was not in the least surprised when the sexton proceeded to inform him that some people in Redcross had begun to speak hardly of Sydney.

“Of course they have,” cried Hercules, impetuously,—“to be sure they have.”

“But,” continued Amby, with hesitation, “there’s some of them says what they have no call to say at all, but perhaps I’m wrong in telling your riverence any thing about it, as it’s sure to aggravate you and make you unasy.”

“That’s the very reason I ought to hear it,” said the curate, with stern composure.

“Why, then,” replied the sexton, “I needn’t acquaint you, sir, that there are people in Redcross, as elsewhere, with malice in their hearts, and bad tongues in their heads; and thim that have no character to

lose themselves are the first to take it away from thim that has."

"Come to the point, Amby."

"I didn't like to tell your reverence before (but there's no help for it) that Master Sydney owes a trifle to the widdy Grogan, who keeps the little shop for ship's stores down at the harbour."

The curate's eye expressed his indignation ; but he was too impatient for the upshot of Amby's narrative to interrupt him by a word.

"Well, she is a poor creature," said Amby, still beating about the bush, "and that's why people say it's so hard upon her in times like these."

"What do they say of my nephew?" demanded Hercules, almost savagely.

"They say," said Amby, at length driven to extremity, "that a young man who would rob a poor widdy, wouldn't think much of robbing his own father."

"What do they mean by that?" cried Hercules.

"Then," said Amby, "they have no ground to stand upon the size of a sixpenny

bit, for their wicked surmises ; only that Ned Grogan, the widdy Grogan's husband's brother, (they're black Prasbyterians, your reverence), swears he met Master Sydney within a stone's throw of the Black Castle on the night of the robbery."

The curate's wrath, when he heard how his unfortunate nephew was slandered by the ruthless tongues of his little creditors, knew no bounds.

"It's well for him, you're a ministher," said Amby.

"My ministry shan't protect him," cried the enraged clergyman ; but, of course, upon reflection, he abandoned his first violent intentions, and also perceived the prudence of the sexton's advice, that nothing ought to be said or done to give an appearance of countenance to what at present was a mere slanderous imputation, without a scintilla of evidence to support it ; for as to Sydney having been seen near the Black Castle on that memorable night, what was there in that to support such a charge against the son

of a clergyman ; and moreover, as the curate remarked, there was just the same evidence against himself.

Leaving the suspicious five-pound note in the custody of Amby Hogg, who was indeed now its rightful owner, Mr. Woodward trudged back to the parsonage. What he had heard about Sydney grieved him sorely, and Ellen Hogg, the schoolmistress, whom he visited for a few moments, perceived that something was wrong with him, but she thought he had been visiting some death-bed, or performing some other melancholy office of charity, and after the performance of such duties, Hercules did not speedily get up his spirits, for though his exterior was so rough and hard, his heart was of another texture. He was a nut with a rugged shell and a sweet and oily kernel.

The first occupation of his thoughts was how immediately to pay off those small debts which his nephew had so shamefully contracted, and still more shamefully left undischarged. He then employed himself specu-

lating upon the nature and singularities of circumstantial evidence ; he put the case that his nephew should be unable to state how the note which he had given to the sexton had come into his possession ; that some other circumstances with a sinister aspect should come to light ; and he then figured to himself how difficult it might become for his nephew to meet a case of the kind, notwithstanding the apparent improbability that such a robbery had been committed by a gentleman, the son of a clergyman, and the identical clergyman who was the chief sufferer by the crime. That such a charge should ever be actually made, seemed, of course, altogether out of the question ; but it was painful to contemplate the bare possibility of the event happening ; and shocking to think that Sydney should have left a character behind him at Redcross, such as to suggest and countenance, instead of being itself an overwhelming answer to, the daring insinuations of calumnious people.

There was another distressing view of the matter which did not occur to Mr. Woodward at first. The sums of which Maguire had been rifled, included money of Frank Vivyan's as well as Mr. Spenser's ; so that the imputation hanging over Sydney was not merely that he was concerned in defrauding his father, but that he had also robbed the man to whom his sister was then actually contracted in marriage.

This view of the case struck Mrs. Woodward at once, and she trembled to think of what Elizabeth would feel and suffer, were the lightest rumour to reach her of what slander was whispering in the miry streets of Redcross.

"These small sums must be paid instantly," said the curate.

"You had better write to Valentine at once," said Carry.

"Val has had a load of trouble lately," said her husband, "and a heavy increase to his expenses, what with removing to town, and sending that unfortunate boy to Cam-

bridge—it was against my judgment—but there's no use in talking of that now. What I think of doing is to dispose of Sligo. Wilkins offered me twenty pounds for him not long ago."

"My dear, good, good Hercules!" cried Carry, jumping up and running to him; "to think of selling the pony!"

"Carry, my dear, I would do more than that to save Val trouble, and, after all, it's not doing much, for I'm not a bad walker, you know; and, at a pinch, I can always take one of the plough-horses."

Hercules sent the pony to Doctor Wilkins that very evening, with a letter stating that he had reconsidered his offer and felt disposed to accept it. The next morning the doctor called at the parsonage and paid him the twenty pounds; upon receiving which the curate set off instantly to Redcross, and went all through the town, accompanied by the sexton, settling the demands against his scampish nephew, carefully, however, concealing the fact that the money came from

his own pocket. It gave him no great trouble to hide his good deeds, he was so accustomed to that kind of under-hand proceeding.

Hercules, however, grossly misreckoned in expecting that the arrangement of these little matters would silence the tongue of defamation. Already had an ill construction been put upon the detention of the five-pound note, virtually by Sidney's relative ; the sexton had repeated to his wife (the slattern sextoness) all the conversation he had held with the curate about Sydney, and what people were saying of him, so that when the payment of the debts followed so speedily, the slattern sextoness shrugged her broad shoulders, only one of which was as much covered by her gown as it should have been, and said, "she knew very well the matter would be hushed up, and that, for her part, she thought it better it should be."

The curate's next step was to write to Sydney. Carry and he concocted the letter between them, sitting at the fire-side in a small parlour, connected with the library.

It was wearing towards dusk on a dry but gusty evening in March. The letter was finished and despatched to Redcross for the next post by one of the farm-servants, who took the bull-dog with him for company and protection.

Carry and Hercules sat down to their plain but neat and excellent dinner. Neatness was Mrs. Woodward's luxury ; she was satisfied when she had a snowy cloth on her table, and a substantial dish or two for the masculine stomach of her spouse. On this occasion there was part of a turbot, which had been caught opposite to the house, with a piece of boiled pork and peas-pudding (a union which the curate was nearly as much attached to as he was to that of England and Ireland). It was abundance in all conscience for two people, particularly as Carry's appetite was not, like the curate's, in direct proportion to the scale of her person.

They had not long been seated, when Carry's maid entered and announced a visitor. She thought she had seen the gentle-

man last summer, but was not very certain, he was so wrapped up. Hercules went out; and his boisterous greetings reaching his wife's ear, assured her that it was no stranger who had arrived, but some old and very welcome friend. It was George Markham, whom the curate found in the hall, disencumbering himself of his coats and shawls. He had not dined, and after a few minutes' attention to the toilette (during which the fish and the joint were sent back to the kitchen to be kept hot), he made a third at the curate's table, but did scanty justice to his substantial fare. He appeared to be much fatigued and way-worn, so that neither host nor hostess pressed him with many questions, though one was nearly as curious as the other to learn what it could be that brought him back so unexpectedly to Donegal. When dinner was over, Markham preferred a glass of the rector's old Innishowen to wine, and dispelled the reserve which a very unlooked-for visit occasions as long as the motive of it is unknown, by saying, in his

usual frank way that he had come down to the country on a matter of business, which he would mention to the curate in the morning. "I must be your debtor," he added, with something of his natural vivacity, "for this night's lodging, as I find you have not yet repaired your bridge."

The evening was a short one. Carry fancied that it was not altogether fatigue that made Markham unsociable; unpleasant thoughts occurred to her; her niece was uppermost in her mind, and she naturally apprehended that something or other had occurred to verify the old adage about the course of love. It was a relief to her when their visitor requested permission to retire, for she wished to be alone again in council with Hercules, to discuss what it possibly could be that brought Markham to the parsonage, and was evidently weighing on his spirits more than sleep on his eye-lids.

"Sufficient to the day, my dear," said Hercules, half quoting the text; "but Mr. Markham's business is obvious enough;

he is come over about his friend's affairs, of course."

"Oh, Hercules, I am certain of it," she answered; "something is going wrong."

The curate laughed, and said he only alluded to the affairs of Vivyan's little estate, which it was but natural he should have begged Markham to attend to in his absence. Carry was not to be persuaded of this, though her husband said he had no doubt on the subject, and in this divided state of opinion the curate and his wife retired to rest.

Terrible was the disclosure of the following morning. Through the gun-smiths of London and Dublin, Markham had traced the ownership of the pistol found at the Black Castle to Sydney Spenser.

CHAPTER L.

LETTERS FROM TOWN.

“Let us hear from thee by letters,
And I likewise will visit thee with mine.”

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

MARKHAM went as abruptly as he came. With the utmost delicacy and tenderness he discharged what he considered his duty, and no man could have felt more poignantly for the distress he caused. His principal object was to enable Sydney's friends to send him out of the way in time, before the discovery of his assumed criminality through some other channel.

It was some time before Hercules saw all the painful bearings of the case, as it now stood. The marriage of Elizabeth Spenser was involved in the result ; it was evidently im-

possible it could take place until everything connected with this unfortunate business was cleared up, and cleared up honourably to the reputation of her brother.

Markham grasped the hand of the tender-hearted curate, in whose eye a great drop of manly sorrow glittered, as he thought of the grief that was in store for Carry and the niece, whom both he and she loved like a daughter. Hercules brushed away the tear with his sleeve. Markham stooped and plucked a primrose which grew opportunely at his feet, the firstling of the Irish spring. They walked side by side for some moments without speaking; then Markham again wrung his friend's hand, and hastened to the boat which waited for him.

Mrs. Woodward was as quick as her husband had been slow to see the connexion between Elizabeth's union with Vivyan, and even the shadow of guilt upon Sydney's character. The idea stirred all the woman, the friend, the sister, and the mother, within her; she entered with only too lively an

imagination into all the miseries with which even a doubt was pregnant; the anguish to her sensitive brother, the ruin of Elizabeth's happiness, perhaps for life, the disgrace of the family, the cruel wrong to her nephew himself, who was redeeming his youthful follies at Cambridge (at least she thought so), little dreaming of the cloud that was gathering over his head at home. Some time, indeed, elapsed, before her husband could make her understand that there was any thing in the aspect of affairs by which Sydney could be seriously compromised. Carry was not as familiar with the nature of circumstantial evidence as if she had been the wife of a lawyer, and probably few lawyers' wives know much more about it than what they read in slipshod novels while their husbands go their circuits. Even when the curate did make her see what the cumulative effect of the various circumstances would be in a court of justice, Carry still took a woman's view of the matter, and said,

“But it is all nonsense, Hercules. Surely you can’t think for a moment that Sydney is really guilty.”

“On the contrary, I firmly believe him innocent,” said her husband, “but it is not a question of fact at present—God forbid it were—it is a question of opinion; not of your opinion, or mine, Carry, but what the opinion of strangers will be—of a man like Mr. Markham, for example, or a man like Vivyan.”

“As to Vivyan,” she replied, “he would just as easily be brought to believe that Elizabeth herself committed the crime.”

“Sit down, Carry,” said Hercules, and, leading her to a sofa, he seated himself beside her, and then resumed, speaking slowly and collectedly,—“Elizabeth was not out of her bed on the night of the robbery; she was not seen that night close to the scene of it; she did not settle an account with money that bears Maguire’s private marks; she was not the possessor of a brace of pistols, one of which was found by George Markham and

myself amongst the weeds, not many yards from the spot where the outrage was perpetrated."

"Oh," cried his wife, with strong emotion, "are all these facts in evidence against Sydney?"

"There is, unhappily, not a shadow of a doubt upon one of them,—but support yourself, my dear Carry, for this is a severe trial, and may possibly require all our strength to sustain, not only ourselves, but others."

"Oh, Hercules, if it should be *true*, when the very imputation is so shocking to think of!"

She threw herself back on the sofa, and spoke with her hands clasped over her forehead.

"Let us face it boldly," said the curate, "and shut our eyes to nothing; it is the wise course, were it only for the sake of the unfortunate boy himself, whom I firmly believe guiltless, despite of all the appearances against him."

"Guiltless!—impossible!" cried Carry,

almost distracted, and now thinking it hopeless to reconcile the facts which had been just recapitulated with her unfortunate nephew's innocence.

"Not so ; far from impossible," said her husband, "and yet I have not enumerated all the adverse circumstances,—two just occur to me ; I now recollect that Sydney declined to visit the Black Castle with Markham and me on the day we found the pistol—I thought it odd at the time—and when we exhibited it on our return in his presence, he did not claim, or seem to recognise it."

"It was growing dark, Hercules,—I remember the evening perfectly."

"Well," said the curate, rising, "I shall write to the unfortunate boy again ; I trust and hope he will be able to explain everything."

As he was leaving the room, Peter brought letters which had just arrived, and amongst them was one from Elizabeth and one from the rector. They were both for

Carry. Miss Spenser did not write from home, but from a villa in the neighbourhood of town, which the Bonhams had lately taken for a short period. The health of Lady Bonham, whom, next to her aunt, Elizabeth loved most tenderly, had recently been declining; and as it was always her greatest happiness and comfort to have Elizabeth with her, it was so particularly now, when her illness unfitted her for general society, and made that of one beloved friend more than ever valuable. This part of the letter was written in great depression of spirits, for Lady Bonham was a woman who was loved enthusiastically by the few who knew her sufficiently to love her at all. She was indeed a woman of the Eleonora race, though when she died, as, not many months after, she did, she had no Dryden to honour her memory in verse that will never die.

She was a woman of lofty figure, and singularly fascinating and gracious aspect; her mind was highly cultivated and richly stored, not with common-place acquirements, but

with the knowledge that is at once elegant and profitable. Her taste in books and conversation was, perhaps, somewhat masculine, like that of Elizabeth herself, but not to the extent that displeases men, though it disqualified her to live with the frivolous of her own sex. Distinguished and remarkable in many ways, her most striking attributes were the earnestness and fervour of her character. This showed itself most in her religion, which was not so much a principle as a divine and sweet enthusiasm, which made her a very apostle in her sphere. She did more than many divines to diffuse the spirit of Christianity wherever her influence extended, and she enjoyed, if ever woman did, that "heaven upon earth" described by Bacon, when "the mind moves in charity, rests in providence, and turns upon the poles of truth."

Such was Lady Bonham. She deserves this passing notice, were it only for the sake of the rector's daughter, who was so devotedly attached to her.

Mr. Spenser's letter was full of interesting matter. Exclamation after exclamation escaped from Mrs. Woodward, as she ran her eye rapidly over it. "Miss M'Cracken gone—such a scene—such a fracas—my poor Valentine—and Elizabeth absent—a monster of ingratitude—married to that policeman—post-mistress—impossible! Oh! Hercules, only think of that abominable woman being at this moment post-mistress of Redcross!"

"Of Redcross!" cried the curate, in amazement.

"Mr. Dawson's interest, of course," said his wife.

The rector gave the following detailed account of the circumstances connected with the departure of Lucy.

He was sitting one morning after breakfast reading the *Edinburgh Review*. Miss M'Cracken entered in a particularly smart walking-dress, and approached him smiling.

"Well, Lucy," said the bland clergyman, laying down on his knee the book in blue and yellow.

“I have news to tell you, sir,” she said, with a sly simper.

“Something good of yourself, I hope, Lucy.”

“Yes, sir.” Then she cast her eyes on the ground, like a marble modesty, and added, “I was married this morning.”

“The clandestine marriage,” said Mr. Spenser, with good-humoured surprise; “but I congratulate you with all my heart upon the happy event, though I suppose its ultimate effect will be to deprive us of you.”

“Yes, indeed, sir, I fear it will,” she replied, with well feigned regret; and then in a faltering tone, also assumed for the occasion, she announced her second piece of intelligence—the appointment to the provincial post-office.

“Have you communicated all this good news to Mrs. Spenser?” asked the astonished rector.

“Not yet, sir; I was so afraid of agitating her, sir.”

“Indeed, Mrs. Peacock, I fear it will,” he replied, anxiously.

“Mrs. Edward Peacock, please, sir ; my husband is only a younger son.”

The rector found it difficult to suppress a smile at the girl's ridiculous airs ; but the sequel was no laughing matter. It was absolutely necessary to break the news to Mrs. Spenser, and as neither the rector nor Lucy would undertake the task alone, they agreed to go about it together.

The first question the hysterical lady put was—“by whose interest the appointment had been obtained?”

“My husband's parliamentary connexions,” replied Lucy, with ludicrous importance. Dawson had charged her to keep his share in the business a secret.

Mrs. Spenser scoffed like a maniac at the parliamentary connexions of a police-constable. Lucy was about to reply in the same tone, but the rector laid his hand on her arm, and in a low, earnest voice, besought her to be quiet. She bit her lip, and commanded her busy member.

Then came the critical question—“When

did Mrs. Peacock propose to resign her present employment?"

Lucy knew the effect her answer would produce, and had armed herself in triple brass to make it.

"To-morrow, madam, if you please," she said, with the most impudent composure.

"I do not please," shrieked the irritated invalid, not irritated, indeed, without cause in the present instance.

Lucy contented herself with replying, that Mr. Edward Peacock had already taken places in the Donegal Mail.

The excitement and rage of Mrs. Spenser were indescribable. The distracted rector, while he sought to calm her, could not but join in severely censuring Mrs. Peacock, who at length waxed hot, too, stoutly defended herself against her master, and repaid the invectives of her mistress with usury.

The rector was eventually compelled to push the termagant young lady out of the room ; and when he returned to the bedside of his wife he found her in a truly alarming

state, and a serious apprehension was entertained for some time that she had ruptured a blood-vessel in the paroxysm of her passion. When Mr. Spenser wrote, she was not entirely out of danger.

“Well,” said Carry, “I am heartily glad they are rid of that odious woman, at all events ; although I wish she had been provided for anywhere else in the world but in our neighbourhood.”

“She can do no great harm as post-mistress,” said the curate.

When he walked into the town that same evening, and went to the post-office, amongst other places, he actually found the Peacocks installed, and Lucy transacting in person the business of that confidential department. She had only arrived the preceding day, and almost the first letter committed to her charge was that which Mr. Woodward had just written to Sydney, at college. After congratulating his old acquaintance upon her marriage and advancement,—being extremely anxious about the subject of his

correspondence, he was particular in his inquiries as to the hour of forwarding the mail, and strict in his injunctions to Lucy to take care to despatch his letter by the earliest post. Perhaps this piqued the new post-mistress's curiosity, or perhaps she was impelled by her more general thirst for information;—be this as it might, the curate was no sooner gone than Lucy Peacock, putting the letter into her bosom, retired into a neat little bed-chamber, adjoining the office, bolted the door, lighted a taper, and very cleverly slipping the heated blade of a small pen-knife under the wax of the seal, raised it daintily from the paper, and made herself rapidly acquainted with every syllable of the despatch to Cambridge. This done, she heated the knife again, nicely melted the under surface of the seal, and brought the edges of the paper again into contact with an adroitness that would have been wonderful if this had been her first attempt of the kind; which it probably was not. This delicate little proceeding having been taken,

the new post-mistress deposited the letter in the bag with the strictest probity, and went about her household arrangements. She had a small, but neat and cheerful suite of apartments, which she tastefully decorated with all the little nicknacks, gimcracks, and articles of cheap *vertu* which she had accumulated in the days of her governess-ship. Over the mantle-piece of her "drawing-room" she hung up, in seemly order, her gallery of exemplary men and pattern women, to which she had made some nice additions in Dublin; and, on the shelves of a very gay glass-case, she displayed all the pretty books of her own property, with several to which her right might have been fairly disputed, particularly by members of the Spenser family.

CHAPTER LI.

DAWSON IN PARLIAMENT.

“Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, ’tis thine. Pistol, I will double-charge thee with dignities.”

SECOND PART OF KING HENRY IV.

IF the curate’s first letter to his nephew did not much alarm him, the second had more success. It found Sydney occupied with neither

“Wit, eloquence, or poetry,
Or search of deep philosophy,”

but carousing in a circle of young debauchees of his own age, whom he was treating to wine, fruits, and ices, and enchanting with his Irish melodies and mimicries, comic songs and stories, some of which he sang and told as cleverly as Mr. Lover. Never had

greater folly been committed than to launch a youth like Sydney Spenser, without studious habits or tastes, without the ballast of principle or judgment, upon the dangerous sea of an English university. He scarcely made a week's stand against the multitudinous seductions of the place. Accustomed not merely to the gratification of his senses, but to the practice of many little clandestine and unworthy arts to procure the means of self-indulgence, he arrived at Cambridge in a high state of preparation for a course of extravagance and sensuality; and if Science and Literature found him a slow scholar, Vice and Folly, on the contrary, had no cause to be dissatisfied with his progress. The progress from dissipation to debt, and from debt to dishonour, has too often been related to need reiteration here. It is enough to say, that Sydney Spenser found the road to ruin as free from obstructions, as broad, smooth, flowery, and inviting as any young man who ever travelled it. It was easier to raise a hundred pounds at Cambridge than

it had been to raise ten in the county of Donegal. At Redcross, the position and means of his father were known to every body, and besides, the shop-keepers were too poor themselves to give long or considerable credits; but on the banks of the Cam it was quite different. Instead of soliciting credit from the tradesmen, the tradesmen solicited him to become their debtor; and such was the current impression as to the wealth of the Irish Church, that directly it was known that Sydney was the son of a beneficed clergyman, there was scarcely an amount to which the tailors, hatters, confectioners, and fruiterers would not have accommodated him; and, what was more, there was no so monstrous price for their goods, or no usury on the sums of money they supplied him with, which they did not think it perfectly fair to impose. It was only to be wondered at, considering all this, that his involvements at the present period were not greater than they actually were; what they did amount to, he himself had no notion, but had all the de-

mands of his Cambridge creditors been totted up, and his various debts of honour added to them, five hundred pounds would not have cleared off the score, even after a smart taxation, and he had not yet been six full months a pupil of the excellent Mr. Peters.

Sydney had not seen Dawson for some time, but on receiving the letters from his uncle, he determined to go up to London, seeing by the newspapers that there was a call of the house, which would probably bring together the scattered elements of the council of the nation. But it was necessary to write to his uncle before he left Cambridge, and again he might have redeemed himself by frankly stating the truth upon both the points that so urgently required elucidation—the hand from which he had got the bank-note, and the way in which he had lost the pistol. He persisted, however, in the same course of infatuated insincerity; declared that it was utterly out of his power to say, after so long an interval, from whom he had received a particular sum of money ;

and with respect to the pistol, he made a careless statement, partly true and partly false, namely, that he had lost a brace of pocket-pistols about the time in question, that it was possible they might have fallen into bad hands, but he suspected there must be some mistake about the identity of the pistol found last summer by Markham and his uncle, as he had not recognised it at the time. So much of Sydney's letter was lamentably defective in truth and good sense; but the scorn and indignation with which he repelled the monstrous charge which his base slanderers at Redcross seemed disposed to fix upon him, were perfectly sincere, and exactly in the tone to be expected from the son of a gentleman accused of a crime so inexpressibly heinous. He concluded by saying, that, though he thought it right to reply to questions put to him by his relatives, yet he would not stoop to vindicate himself in any other quarter; the enormity of the imputation was an answer to itself, and he would take no further notice of it except

with one of his uncle's clubs, or with another pair of pistols which he fortunately had still in his possession.

Dawson was at the Burlington, confounding night and day as usual, legislating, drinking, jobbing, gaming, leading a life of miscellaneous profligacy between clubs, committees, taverns, and billiard-tables. There is always a little knot of lawgivers who live in this sort of way during the session, call it parliamentary life, and make a great merit of sacrificing in the public service the health and strength which they really squander in disgracing the legislature, not in performing its duties.

Sydney called at the Burlington at twelve o'clock on the day of his arrival in town. Mr. Dawson had not been long in bed; he generally breakfasted at three in the afternoon. Sydney called again at four. Mr. Dawson had gone down to the house, leaving a line for Sydney on a card, requesting him to follow and send in his name by the door-keepers.

Who ever forgot his first impressions of the lobby of the House of Commons? It seemed at first sight to Sydney merely a dim, dirty, noisy room, crowded with people, either passing to and fro in several directions, or standing chatting in groups. The first intimation he had that there was any regularity in its seeming confusion, was a civil but peremptory order to stand back, given him by a stout short elderly man in a plain black suit. Sydney perceived a baton in his hand, and thence inferred that the elderly man was a constable, and not the Speaker. His next discovery was, that there was one leading thoroughfare in the apartment between two rows of wooden pillars. There was a double door at the far end, continually opening and shutting, and revealing, when it opened, momentary glimpses of a hall, lighted with gilt chandeliers, and not very unlike a parish church. Now and then Sydney thought he saw a personage at the upper extremity in a big wig, who might have stood for the rector, while a couple of lesser

wigs beneath him represented the curate's assistant. Incomprehensible things were going on at the door. In the first place there were posted there, one upon each side, two men in complete black suits, with white heads, very red faces, and an alternate gentleness and fierceness of aspect and demeanour which seemed as difficult to understand as the British constitution itself. Sometimes these mysterious red-faced men bowed to the ground, and seemed all blandness and servility. Then, again, they seemed to wax suddenly ferocious, and sometimes even flew like bull-dogs at gentlemen who approached them, though in many instances of much less questionable exterior than those upon whom they fawned. Repeatedly people stepped up to them, and with the utmost humility presented them with cards or papers, which sometimes they superciliously received, and then anon contemptuously spurned. This looked almost as if they were two of his Majesty's principal Secretaries of State ; but then the deference they were seen to pay

the next moment to shabby fellows, not half so well dressed as themselves, negatived that supposition, and left their functions still a conundrum. While he was trying to solve, and on the point of asking some of the bystanders to solve it for him, he spied Mr. Trundle not far off, still carrying his roll, now nearly as thick as himself, so easy is it to get millions of signatures to any document, no matter how preposterous its contents. Trundle, however, was probably the honestest man in the lobby, for he was seeking nothing for himself, only a modest thirty millions of money for the drainage of Loch Swilly. Sydney watched his movements with interest. He was pressing forward with vigour, as fast as he could with his burden, and had just gained a position within about a yard of the door, when the two red-faced men sprang at him simultaneously, which was the first circumstance that seemed clearly to establish their janitorial functions. Poor Mr. Trundle was good-humour itself, and being also supported by his patriotic enthu-

siasm, he was returning to the charge, when the valves of the door were opened from the inside; a gentleman walked rapidly out,—“Lord ——”—“one of the ministers”—ran through the crowd; the red-faced men did homage as he passed, and Mr. Trundle rushed, or rather rolled, after him. This was highly amusing to Sydney; but there was more diversion in store for him, for Mr. Connolly, the droll attorney, whom the reader has already seen in the waiting-room of Dublin Castle, was one of the throng, and was keeping, as usual, every body near him in roars of laughter, by the never-ceasing flow of his fun, anecdote, and shrewd remarks upon men and things. Connolly, however, had his eyes bent upon the door like others, and at length approached it. He was put back. After some interval, he tried it again, but again was repulsed. A third time, and one of the fierce men with red faces ran at him as he had done before at Mr. Trundle, and Sydney heard him say,

“ You must stand back, sir ; you are not a member of the house.”

“ Thank ye for the information,” retorted Connolly, with humorous composure, and undauntedly regarding the gruff official ; “ but if I’m not a member of the house at this present moment, may-be it won’t be so some of those days, and the first motion I’ll make, my fine fellow, after taking my sate, will be that you and your colleague opposite shall wear red plush inexpressibles.”

A burst of laughter followed this sally, particularly from Connolly’s countrymen, who were present in great force, and most of whom had, doubtless, received what they considered affronts from the fiery officials at the door, which were now handsomely avenged by the disparaging speech of the humorous attorney. But the wrath of the red-faced man in black was not to be described ; dreadful deeds would have been done, as Homer says, and Connolly might have been committed to the coal-hole for his audacity, had not the scene instantly changed.

The door of the house was suddenly flung open, and poured forth an impetuous tide of senators, flying from a speech of Sir Andrew Agnew, or some other dinner-bell, the Urquharts and Ansteys of the period. Foremost in the rout was Dawson : he spied and seized Sydney by the arm, and carried him away to Bellamy's.

Sydney spoke during dinner of what was uppermost in his mind, the annoying news he had received from Ireland. Dawson treated the matter with the utmost levity and contempt, and advised his friend to do so too.

"I have always through life, my dear fellow," said Dudley, "made it a rule to stand on my character; it's the best way, rely upon it; never defend yourself against the charges of a rascal; thrash him, or kick him, if you like, but give him no other answer."

"But one can't thrash cobblers and tinkers," said Sydney. "I only wish a *gentleman* would impeach my honour."

"You are very well off, I think," said

Dawson, "to have your honour only impeached by cobblers and tinkers."

"I shall never be at ease," said Spenser, talking in the lowest possible tone of voice that could be heard by his friend, "until the fellows are found out who committed the robbery. For my part, I cannot but strongly suspect the men who were at Castle-Dawson that day at dinner."

He then informed Dawson that he had positively received from Thomson, in settlement of the account of the whist-table, the five-pound note which he had paid over to his father's sexton. Dawson said it was very strange, and quite possible that Sydney might be right.

"Did you ever see him since?" Sydney inquired.

Dawson said he had not, and thought he would scarcely recognise, were he to meet him.

The conversation then changed. Dawson was dull and abstracted, as usual, until the wine operated: he drank port freely, and

grew more parliamentary and patronizing at every glass. He began by talking in a strain of indignation of the scandalous exclusion of Irishmen from high offices in the government.

“I don’t care for salary,” he said, “but I care for place, and place I’m resolved to have. I want to be able to advance my friends, and first of all yourself, my dear fellow; I pledge you my word of honour as a gentleman you shall be my first object.”

They drank more wine, and Dawson next requested Sydney to say what he would like to have; from what branch of the public service he would like to have a thousand a year or so dropping into his mouth.

Sydney’s eyes glistened, as he answered that he would count himself a lucky fellow to have such a salary in any department of the state. He thought of his debts at Cambridge, and how pleasant it would be to pay them off out of the public purse. Then he inquired what office his liberal friend proposed to fill himself.

“Men generally begin with the Treasury,”

said Dawson ; but after another pint of port, he was disposed to think that he might possibly, in certain contingencies, and with particular stipulations, be prevailed on to accept a situation abroad, but nothing under the government of a colony, or an island.

“ In such an event,” he added, now overflowing with generosity and friendship, “ what would you think, my dear fellow, of going out with me as my secretary ?”

Sydney had no time to answer this serious question, for immediately a bell rang loud and sharply ; Dawson jumped up ; the house was going to divide, and every one flew to his place.

“ Breakfast at one to-morrow,” said Dawson, shaking the astonished Sydney by the hand, and flying with the rest.

Between the unusual noise and bustle, the port wine, and the visions of place and power which his parliamentary friend had filled his mind with, Sydney’s brain was now seething like a kettle ; his eyes were beginning to swim ; he felt feverish, and the cool air of the streets was an agreeable relief.

He wandered about for some time, and then feeling drowsy, returned to his hotel, threw himself on a sofa in the coffee-room, and slept for more than two hours. He then rose, and seeing that it was only eleven o'clock, he went out again, intending to drop into one of the minor theatres, to see John Reeve or Liston. Liston was then killing the public with laughter at the Olympic, and Sydney, having ascertained this from the bills, proceeded there to lay in a fresh stock of fun for his boon-companions at Cambridge. Several people of both sexes were loitering about the piazzas, as usual. Two men stood so close to the door that he had to brush close by them in order to enter the house; a stream of light from a lamp fell directly on the face of one of them. Sydney's memory for faces was good; he thought he recognised the ghastly features of Mr. Thomson, and a second glance assured him that his conjecture was right. Instead of entering the theatre, he now withdrew to some little distance under the vestibule, undecided

whether to accost his suspicious acquaintance, or only watch his movements. He had not been debating this point with himself for three minutes, when a cab drove up within a couple of yards from where he stood. A gentleman jumped out; it was Dawson, and Sydney was just running up to him, when he was anticipated by the man he had been observing. Sydney was amazed. Only two or three hours ago his friend Dudley had stated that he had never seen Mr. Thomson since last summer, that he scarcely recalled his features, and now he saw him shake him by the hand, and they walked away together immediately in close conference towards the Strand.

Sydney neither kept his appointment with Dawson the following morning, nor sent him any message or communication. When Dawson inquired about him at the Union Hotel, he was informed that he had left town by a morning coach for Cambridge.

Dawson wrote to him at the University, but received no answer. Sydney had started for Ireland.

CHAPTER LII.

THE CURATE IN TOWN.

“A poor man, sir, in point of gold and silver ; he has not land enough to serve him for a grave, but he has a treasury of worth in his heart, and will travel round the globe barefoot, to be at the side of a friend in need.”—NEW PLAY.

THE vindictive Mrs. Peacock was not long in turning to account the information she had picked out of the curate's letter. Lucy had an old flirtation with the sub-editor of the *Tyrconnell Mercury*, a certain sentimental Mr. O'Dowd, whom she had once even thought of marrying, but was deterred by the name, which she did not think a pretty or imposing one. Through her influence with this literary gentleman she procured the insertion of the following piquant little paragraph in the journal with which he was connected:—

“Strange reports are current on the subject of the robbery committed last summer on the proctor of a well-known clergyman in this county. A small pistol, of exquisite workmanship, is said to have been found on the spot where the crime was perpetrated, which will probably lead to the detection of the guilty parties. In the meantime we deliberately suspend our opinion; but it would seem highly improbable that such a pistol could have been in the possession of any person under the rank of a gentleman.”

The pain which these few lines gave the Woodwards was intense. They tried in vain to conjecture how the fact alluded to could have become known to the conductors of the *Mercury*, and were apprehensive that Markham had not been sufficiently reserved upon the subject. Mr. Spenser, when he saw the paragraph, wrote instantly to his brother-in-law, being naturally curious to learn what the reports were to which allusion was made. Hercules and Carry consulted together, and the result of their deliberations was, that Hercules resolved on a journey to Dublin.

The old portmanteau was again compelled to yield up the extraordinary miscellany of odds and ends of which it was the depository when off regular duty, and Carry packed it herself with the curate's Sunday suit, and put in his gown and cassock, in case he should be invited to preach some charity sermon.

The rector, indeed, never was more in want of the presence and support of his strenuous friend. His wife's illness had assumed a dangerous aspect; and on the very day of the curate's arrival in town, Mr. Spenser received his first intimation, in a letter from Mr. Peters, of the career of extravagance which his son had been running at college.

The letter coolly stated that the debts, on the whole, did not probably exceed six hundred pounds, and the writer excused himself for not having made a very minute inquiry on the ground that he was then deeply absorbed in some abstruse mathematical researches. Six hundred pounds was more than one-half of Mr. Spenser's income, and he had already, as we have seen, contracted

a debt of five hundred, to meet the expenses consequent upon his removal to town. Dearly was he now beginning to pay the inevitable penalty of his conjugal facility and his parental *insouciance*.

The critical situation of Mrs. Spenser had already recalled Elizabeth to town. How lovingly she flew to welcome her uncle, when, totally unexpected, he entered the drawing-room; how tenderly the huge good man returned her affectionate embraces. Mr. Spenser was in his wife's room. Elizabeth saw anxiety on Mr. Woodward's forehead, and concluded that he, too, had heard the untoward news of Sydney, and had good-naturedly come up to cheer and advise her father. Mr. Spenser appeared in a few moments. Each saw dejection in the visage of the other, and each ascribed it to the cause of uneasiness with which he was acquainted himself. It was not until Elizabeth retired that they mutually discovered that there were two sources of trouble instead of one, and that Sydney was concerned equally in both.

But Mr. Woodward was more deeply affected by the information his brother-in-law communicated, than the latter was by the business which brought the curate to Dublin. Mr. Spenser thought that the curate was frightening himself with a bugbear in attaching so much weight to the gossip of idle and malicious tongues of Redcross.

“This is one of those accusations, Hercules,” said the rector, “which would require the most positive and direct evidence to support it. What the boy states in his letter to you is no doubt the simple truth. Besides, no human being in his senses would ever suppose that the paragraph in the *Mercury* could possibly refer to Sydney. I heartily wish his follies were as visionary as his crimes. His debts are unfortunately only too real.”

“How will you meet them, Val?”

The rector looked profoundly melancholy, but made no answer, and Hercules did not allude to the subject again. On the other point, too, he said as little as possible, trying

to persuade himself that his brother-in-law took the right view of it, and unwilling to add to the cares of a man who had care enough on his mind already. In conversation with Elizabeth he never alluded to either subject; she had not as yet a notion of the suspicions afloat to her brother's prejudice, and as to the newspaper paragraph, she fancied that it was aimed at Dawson.

It was fine weather, and as Mrs. Spenser repelled the attentions of her niece, and preferred to be waited on by a hired nurse-tender, Elizabeth was her uncle's constant companion during his stay in Dublin; they perambulated the town a good deal together, and much speculation they caused in the fashionable thoroughfares. The tall uncouth formidable man in clerical attire, with that refined and handsome girl hanging on his arm, looking so ill-assorted, and yet perfectly well pleased with her rough companion, like the fair maiden in romance under the escort and patronage of the lion. Everybody saw that Hercules was a country clergyman,

at most a rural dean ; and it was a question whether Elizabeth was his daughter or his wife, though it was difficult to conceive how she could be connected with him in either or in any way.

The Dabzacs were now in town, having taken a house for the season, not far from where the Spensers resided. Mrs. Dabzac called almost every day to inquire for her step-mother, and sometimes dropped in for a moment to see her father or Elizabeth: but it was only a moment, for she was always on her way to some gay scene, a *déjeuner*, a concert, or a flower-show ; or Lady Brabble was in her carriage, or she expected Lord and Lady Western to lunch. Then the curate saw her name daily in the newspapers in the accounts of drawing-rooms, balls, dinners, in short, all the festive doings of the Dublin world, and he thought it strange that a daughter should lead such a life, while her father was in so much trouble. But Elizabeth made twenty excuses for her sister, and often reminded her uncle that

Arabella was not long married, and that her husband was not the sort of man to forego his social enjoyments because his wife's step-mother was indisposed. Hercules met Mrs. Dabzac only once. Elizabeth took him with her to pay a visit of civility, which he was the more particular to do, as he had been so ill-used at the wedding. A chariot, with a lady in it, was standing at the door, which opened almost directly Mr. Woodward knocked, and Mrs. Dabzac appeared at the same moment, tripping down stairs, superbly dressed, and thinking of anything but her rural relations. She uttered an exclamation of unaffected surprise, but feigned and ill-feigned pleasure, and received her uncle the curate with her habitual cold simper, only giving him two of her fingers, to save her gloves from being violated, and pouring out a torrent of frigid nothings, partly addressed to him and partly to her sister, while at the same time she kept beckoning to her friend in the carriage, as much as to say "what a bore!—what a *contre-tems*!" She kindly

offered, however, to return to the drawing-room, and have "a long chat about old times" with her unwelcome visitors ; which they, of course, would not hear of; and they also declined to go into the parlour, where there was luncheon, as they had lunched before. So far Hercules acted perfectly to the satisfaction of his heartless niece, but he spoiled all by insisting on handing her into the chariot. It certainly made an amusing scene. A group of Mrs. Dabzac's gayest acquaintance were passing, and two superfine men of an hussar regiment also rode up at the moment, so that poor Hercules found himself suddenly surrounded by a set of people who looked at him as if he was an ourang-outang; and as to Mrs. Dabzac, she could not have felt or looked more ashamed of her uncle, had he actually been an animal of that species.

The next day the cards of Colonel and Mrs. Dabzac were left for Mr. Woodward, and also an affectionate note, in which his niece proved to a demonstration, by a list of

her engagements, that it was out of her power to have her uncle to dinner any day for the next week, but trusted she would see a great deal of him on his next visit to Dublin, or perhaps at Dabzac House in the course of the summer. The only remark Hercules made upon this (whatever he may have thought of it) was that "it was no time for dining out." Nor indeed was it, at least for people like himself and Elizabeth, for not only was Mrs. Spenser sinking apace (having, in addition to her regular train of maladies, been attacked by an epidemic then raging in Dublin), but Lady Bonham was declining also. Elizabeth knew that her friend would gladly receive a visit from such a man as her uncle, and Hercules was always ready to go to the house of mourning. He held a long private conversation with the declining lady, and when he rejoined his niece in another apartment, he found her alone and in tears. She had seen Lord Bonham, and had heard from his own lips that the physicians had abandoned all hopes of their patient. Eliza-

beth wept again upon her uncle's shoulder as she told him the cause of her sorrow. "She deserves those tears," he said, as he comforted her, and shed one or two himself; "she is a noble creature, Lizzy; she is fit to live, and she is fit to die."

The next day was Sunday. It was Mr. Spenser's turn to preach at the Castle Chapel, but at nine o'clock in the morning, his wife was pronounced in imminent danger, and the rector had no one to do the duty for him but his brother-in-law. It was a trying situation for the modest country parson to preach at a moment's notice in the presence of the court; Carry never dreamed of such an event, when she packed up his gown and cassock; but Hercules acquitted himself well, and his robust style and fervent manner attracted the gracious attention of the excellent viceroy himself. When he retired to lay aside his sacred garments, an aid-de-camp was announced, and was in the act of inviting the astonished curate to dine with the Lord-Lieutenant, when a hurried note from his

niece was put into his hand,—Mrs. Spenser was no more.

At the same hour, and perhaps the same moment, Mrs. Woodward, having just returned from church, was in her dressing-room at the parsonage, when she was startled by the abrupt appearance of Sydney Spenser. His agitated looks, his disordered dress, his excited manner, frightened her. She sharply scrutinized his features, holding him at a little distance ere she embraced him, but the scrutiny was satisfactory; she found alarm there and indignation, but no guilt. He understood the meaning of her eye, and said, with a scornful smile,

“No, aunt Carry, I am not an highwayman.”

“You did well to come over,” she answered, sitting down on a sofa to recover herself, and motioning Sydney to sit beside her.

“Where is my uncle?” he asked.

“In Dublin.”

“Then I shall not stay here an hour; I

must see and consult with uncle Hercules without loss of time."

Carry approved of his resolution, but was naturally anxious to have from his own lips an account of the circumstances which had awakened suspicion, not doubting but that, when related by him, they would make the groundlessness of the charge as plain as the light of the day. But he had not gone far in his story before she clearly perceived that he was not making a clean breast; that he was concealing some things and varying in his statement of others. In truth, he was driven to and fro between his suspicions of Dawson, and his reluctance to implicate a man whose spell was still upon him, and of whose power to injure or to serve him he entertained an habitually exaggerated notion.

Those doublings and falterings alarmed Mrs. Woodward more than she had been alarmed yet.

"Sydney," she exclaimed, with passionate emotion, "you are not adhering to the truth, even with me, whom you can have no

earthly object in deceiving. Beware, I implore you, I warn you, how you make your innocence look like guilt by unavailing concealments, dictated, I am convinced, either by false shame, or by your desire to screen somebody, I know not whom. Nobody will believe you guilty, if you do not condemn yourself by acting the part of guilt."

Her feminine vehemence produced a sensible effect. It was as if a Siddons had thus accosted him. Carry pressed her success.

"I fear nothing," she said, "but your own want of candour and directness. Sydney, I implore you, as your near relative, as your true friend, as you value your father's character, your sister's happiness, the respectability of your family, and your own personal safety, do not tamper with the truth. Frankly disclose every circumstance connected with your visit to Castle-Dawson previous to the robbery; disclose them fully, without considering what construction they may bear, or what inference may be drawn from them,

and my life upon it, Sydney, you will come out of this cloud without a shade of suspicion on your character."

It was the advice of a wise woman, given with a force which only women of a certain mettle are capable ; Sydney walked about the room, and promised to act upon it.

"There may be circumstances," added Mrs. Woodward, more calmly—indeed she had fatigued herself with the foregoing appeal, and was now reclining upon the couch where she had just been sitting so erect and commanding—"there may be circumstances which to me you may not think it necessary or proper to reveal ; but in the name of heaven, my dear boy, conceal nothing from your uncle ; put him in possession of the whole truth, from the first to the last, and remember, spare no false friends at the expense of your true ones—you well know my meaning."

So saying, she rose, hastily adjusted her hair, which had fallen into disorder in the agitation of the scene, and took her nephew

down to the dining-room, where she prevailed upon him to take some refreshment before he returned to Redcross.

She embraced and kissed him at parting with the affectionate fervour of a mother, and now for the first time remarked the improvement in his personal appearance. If Cambridge had not moralized and intellectualized, it had mannered and dressed him. He looked like a gentleman, though a foppish one, not like Dudley Dawson any longer. The flash coat, the gaudy cravat, and the check shirt had disappeared. His coat was the work of a Bond Street artist, his boots the handy-work of Hoby. They were not paid for, but they looked not the less handsome and well-made on that account.

Very little now passed at Redcross that escaped the piercing eyes of the new postmaster's wife, or lady, as he called her. She was up early and late, and people that are so see twice as much as sluggards and snoozers do; at least Lucy did. However, it was not very surprising that Sydney's arrival and

departure were not unknown to her, for at least twenty pair of eyes saw him as well as Mrs. Peacock's.

"There's something mysterious in it," said the sexton's slut of a wife, shrugging her broad shoulders at her shop-door, and alternately disclosing them to view, her draperies were so loose and classical.

"It's above my comprehension," said the tobacconist's spouse next-door, taking a curl-paper from her head, to wrap up a penny-worth of snuff for old Randy Maguire.

"Randy knows more anent it than he likes to let on," said Farmer M'Swyne, the knight of the thistle, who had come into town to sell a slip of a pig, and discourse about the weather with the idlers in the market-place.

"Then I just know as much as your own self, Sir Roger," said old Randy.

There was a laugh at the farmer's expense, so he went up the street with his slip of a pig, which was making as great an uproar,

and with as little meaning in it, as if he had been the leading politician of the place.

The sexton's wife and the tobacconist's lady prolonged their gossip at the shop-door, until it was time for tea, when the former invited the latter to share that repast with her ; and the sexton coming home soon after, accompanied by the proctor, the four of them sat down to a game of cards, which they enjoyed exceedingly, while the kettle on the hearth performed a sprightly overture to a supper of punch and oysters.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE REWARD.

“ *Plutus*. What!—I!—can I do such mighty matters?

“ *Chremes*. Can you? Ay by Jupiter, and many more, too, for no man ever had his fill of thee. Of all other things we may be surfeited, even of love; of you never.”

ARISTOPHANES.

SYDNEY arrived in Dublin at an early hour on the day but one after his sudden appearance at Redcross. On reaching the street where his aunt had informed him that his father lived, he found the thoroughfare obstructed by the mournful preparations for a funeral. If there was sorrow, it was not a silent one. There seemed to be no mutes assisting at the ceremony. There was a crowd assembled, and a great bustle amongst coachmen, footmen, and the regular standing army of

the horseboys, beggars, and idlers of the quarter. The undertakers' men were distributing, and the servants were wrangling for those trappings of mock distress, called scarves and hat-bands, a custom introduced into Ireland by way of encouraging the linen manufacture. Sydney had never before had an opportunity of observing the details of a funeral as it is managed in the Irish capital, and he stopped to observe what went on. The black hearse, waved over by black plumes, and drawn by large black horses, led by grooms in sable livery, stood at an open door, thronged with faces of which few were even grave. Behind the bier was a train of some half-dozen carriages, two evidently belonging to the funeral state, for like the hearse they were black, and drawn by horses of the same colour. The other carriages were private ones; two looked like those of the physicians who had either accelerated or failed to defeat the triumph of disease and death. The windows of the upper apartments of the opposite and adjoining houses were thrown up, and

curious cooks and excited house-maids were eagerly gazing down upon the obstreperous scene, as if they had never seen black plumes and white scarves before. Sydney, with his fondness for coarse humour, could not but enjoy, as he could not but hear, the singular mixture of drollery and pathos which characterizes the dialogue of the lower classes in Ireland. While he stood listening, a stir took place in the throng ; the people gave way upon each side as the coffin was borne out. For a moment the crowd was still. The chief mourners followed. Sydney marked them as they issued from the door, and notwithstanding their downcast heads, and the sable mantles that enveloped their persons, he recognised his father and his uncle.

The truth immediately suggested itself, for he had heard from Mrs. Woodward of the dangerous illness of his step-mother.

But one servant remained in his father's house after the funeral had slowly moved away. Sydney asked for his sister; she had been removed the day before to the house

of her friends, the Ramsdens. He obtained the direction, and hurried to find her. It was now about ten o'clock, and the streets were beginning to look lively, if not business-like. Those strange, uncouth, wild, convenient, and inconvenient vehicles, the jaunting-cars, drawn by wild horses and driven by wild men, were beginning to career about the town, obeying no law, human or divine, reckless of the lives and limbs of the passengers, the most of whom, indeed, seemed reckless of their own carcasses, for they preferred the middle of the street to the trottoirs, and when any of the Celtic charioteers, having a drop of the milk of human kindness left, raised a shout of warning to his probable victims, as he drove a muck amongst them, the fellow warned either doggedly despised the caution, or profited by it with a savage execration.

As Sydney was walking rapidly along, rather closer than was prudent to the edge of the *pavé*, one of those unsightly conveniences came sweeping down, the driver on

one side yelling to the populace, a passenger on the other swearing at the driver, and the intermediate space crowded and piled with portmanteaus and travelling-bags. Sydney recoiled to save his knees from collision with the iron steps of the vehicle, and at the same moment meeting the eye of the passenger, discovered that it was his honorable friend the member for Rottenham.

Dawson instantly jumped off, and Sydney's hand was in his grasp before he could agree or disagree to be so embraced. They stood before the hotel where Dawson was in the habit of staying when in Dublin.

"You are cold to me," said Dudley: "how have I offended you?"

The question was not hypocritical. Dawson was really ignorant what offence he had given to young Spenser, who returned some gruff reply, but with an agitation which the other did not fail to notice and take advantage of. He spoke in his most soothing tones, merely inviting Sydney to step into the hotel, and candidly state what he complained of.

To so much Dawson was fairly entitled, and Sydney accompanied him into the house, where the senator, being well known, was speedily accommodated with a private room.

“Breakfast for two,” he said to the waiter, as coolly as if nothing had happened to vary his relations with young Spenser.

Sydney’s bolt was soon shot. He charged his friend Dudley with playing him false respecting his acquaintanceship with Mr. Thomson. Dawson winced under the charge visibly, if Sydney had been collected enough to mark it, but he was over-excited, and at no time very observant. Dawson, however, recovered himself instantly, burst into an affected laugh, and exclaimed—

“Well, they *are* strikingly like one another; I am not in the least astonished at your mistake, ludicrous as it is. Why, man, the fellow you took for Thomson was a reporter of the *Morning Chronicle*; I had an assignation with him, certainly, and I’ll tell you for what, to correct his report of my speech that night on the state of the country.”

Sydney remarked that the piazza of the Olympic was an odd place for an appointment with a reporter.

"Quite the contrary," said Dawson, "the office of the *Morning Chronicle* is in the Strand, you know, hard by."

"And did you speak that night?" continued Sydney, fancying that he was cross-examining his friend very acutely.

Dawson rang the bell.

"Did I, indeed?" he replied, triumphantly; "the Tories know whether I spoke or not. I made a speech, and, what's more, it was a hit, my boy; why, I spoke for one hour and twenty minutes. Sheil only spoke for half an hour, and O'Connell was not on his legs much longer. Waiter, bring me the file of the *Morning Chronicle*. You shall read my speech, corrected by myself from the report of the very fellow you took for Thomson."

"I see I was mistaken," said Sydney, completely hood-winked, "but he was extremely like Thomson, Dudley."

The waiter re-appeared with the file, fol-

lowed by another with breakfast. Sydney then had to listen to two mortal columns of that species of declamation of which the Imperial House of Commons has such a lively horror, but which, it is to be presumed, would rank in an Irish one with the speeches of Cicero, or above them. It was a proper punishment for young Spenser's simplicity. Had he even examined the dates, he would have detected the imposition.

Thus was the misplaced confidence once more re-established, and the fatal ascendancy once more restored. Sydney breakfasted with Dawson, who seemed profoundly affected by the account of Mrs. Spenser's death (much more, indeed, than Sydney himself), and made several touching remarks about the precariousness of earthly things. Then they separated for the morning, after an appointment to meet again at a later hour of the day.

Sydney and Elizabeth met. Elizabeth was in the deepest grief, not for the loss of a step-mother, in whom she had never had so

much as a friend, but for the sorrow in which the event had plunged her father. But she little knew the extent of his distress that melancholy morning. The rector confessed to Hercules, as they returned together in one of the gloomy carriages, after the performance of the funeral rites, that he had no means of paying off his son's debts and his own (the latter now amounting to a large sum) but by a sequestration of his living and the sale of his furniture, and even his books.

"Not the books—not the books, Val," said the good curate, his eye moist and his voice tremulous with sympathy; "we won't let the books go, come what will."

"Hercules, I ought to have taken your advice respecting that boy," said the rector.

"You acted for the best," said Woodward.

Such was the short sad conversation of the mourning coach.

They reached the silent house and entered it unnoticed. The rector buried himself in the inmost chamber, and Hercules went to make arrangements for the immediate return of the

family to the country. Elizabeth hastened to her father's side, and informed him of Sydney's arrival. Mr. Spenser declined to see his son, and sent him a message by his uncle, conveying his desire that he should go to his sister, Mrs. Dabzac (who had gone down a few days before to her country seat in the north), and remain under her roof for the present. Uncle and nephew met. Dawson had regained his dangerous influence upon Sydney since the latter had conversed with his aunt at the parsonage, and all Carry's wise and eloquent advice might as well have been given to the winds. To such an extent, indeed, did the misguided young man now waver in his statements, and equivocate in his replies to the questions put to him, that he actually forced upon his uncle the terrifying conclusion that to some extent or another he was not unimplicated in the crime. All unhappiness about his nephew's debts disappeared from the mind of Hercules directly the idea of his guilt entered it. It was not without some

difficulty that he brought himself to suggest a course which he had been turning in his mind for some time, namely, the expediency of offering a large reward for the discovery of the person or persons who robbed Maguire.

But Sydney seized on the idea with alacrity. "Let my father offer five or six hundred pounds," he exclaimed, flippantly, as if the sum he named was a mere trifle.

He never forgot the tremendous look which his uncle gave him, as he passionately answered,

"Five or six hundred pounds, ill-conditioned boy,—that is about the amount you have squandered in six months in wine and gluttony, on horses and dogs, and your idle and unprincipled associates, reckless whence the money was to come to pay for your profligacy, never thinking what burdens you were heaping on the back of your father, what privations you were bringing on your good sister, what disgrace and misery on all your

relations and connections! Five hundred pounds — you talk glibly of hundreds of pounds!”

Fiercely and impetuously delivered, this speech of Hercules amazed and overwhelmed his nephew: he quailed and cowered under every word as if it had been a blow, twirling a foppish little cane round his finger and looking extremely foolish.

Sydney was at a loss to divine how the news of his excesses had reached the ears of his family. He exclaimed, doggedly and at random, that his enemies exaggerated his wildnesses, as usual.

“No, sir,” resumed his uncle. “I believe the exact contrary is the fact. Your enemies, indeed! Your enemy, sir, is yourself; and, let me tell you, you have a great fool and a great coxcomb for your enemy. Your tutor has inquired, and admits that your debts exceed six hundred pounds—some of them, no doubt, gambling debts—debts of honour, I understand you call them; and

pray, sir, what do you call your debts to the poor shopkeepers at Redcross, to the widow Grogan, for example?"

"All this, sir, is beside the present question," said Sydney, with provoking hauteur, though almost livid at the same time with shame and vexation.

The curate was out of breath, and admitted that, to some extent, it was so.

"To return, then, sir, to the question of the reward," continued the nephew, with the supercilious air of one who has gained an advantage in argument, and slapping his refulgent boots impatiently.

"My opinion is," said the curate, despising his nephew too much to continue a dispute with him, "that the reward ought to be offered by the Government."

"Of course, that would answer equally well," said Sydney.

There was no difficulty about it. Mr. Spenser, that same evening, addressed a note to a leading member of the Irish Govern-

ment, which Hercules the next day presented at the Castle. It procured him an immediate interview, much to the surprise and envy of the throng in the anti-room, who had been making merry at the curate's expense, and marvelling what he could be, or what he could be looking for, unless it was the office of chaplain to Newgate.

The following evening the *Dublin Gazette* announced that the Lord-Lieutenant would give a reward of three hundred pounds to any person who would prosecute to conviction the robbers of Mr. Spenser's proctor, and one hundred pounds to any body who would give such information as would lead to the discovery of the offenders. On the same evening a travelling-carriage drove up to Mr. Spenser's door, and the rector, his daughter, the curate, with the two children, stepped into it, and accomplished the usual first stage of the journey to Redcross.

Dawson heard of the reward first from Sydney. Sydney was dining with him, in-

tending on the following day to go to Mrs. Dabzac's, should she be able to receive him, which he internally hoped she would not. Mr. Spenser had written to her before he left town, requesting her to send her answer to her brother directly. Dawson said the reward was a very proper step; he wondered it had not been thought of before; and then he asked Sydney to take wine.

"Bring some champagne," he cried to the waiter.

"Let it be well iced," added the luxurious young spendthrift, whose father's heart was at that moment breaking in a country inn, bitterly thinking of his benefice about to be mortgaged, and his library going to the hammer. But the iced champagne was drunk—to be sure the senator was to pay for it—and after the champagne they drank a bottle of claret each, and then they went to the play. After the play they resorted, accompanied by two of Dawson's Dublin friends (Bob Sharkey was one of them), to

a notorious house, where they smoked cigars, eat lobsters, and drank mulled port, Sydney objecting to punch, and paying for his supper with his celebrated mimicry of his uncle Hercules. With this amiable effort of genius that virtuous night closed, and the next morning Sydney found on his table the following tender epistle from his married sister:—

“Dabzac House, Tanderagee.

“MY DEAR SYDNEY,

“My feelings so completely overpower me, that I hardly know what I am writing, or whether I am writing or not. Oh, my poor, poor father! what he has gone through—what he has endured; but what a blessing it was to have Elizabeth with him, and my dear good uncle, and you, Sydney, who came over so providentially, just when he required every support. Oh, what would I not have given to have been with you all: but Colonel Dabzac would not hear of it, and

two of the carriage horses are laid up, so it was not to be ; and I hope it is all for the better ; I fear I should have broken down under such a trial. Oh, Sydney, let this be a warning to all of us. No one can tell whose turn it may be next to appear at the dread tribunal. Oh, that we may be all prepared. I am sure, my dear, dear Sydney, if your coming to us just now would be any relief or amusement to you, it would only make me too happy to have you with us, and it would gratify my husband, too, more than I can tell. The way we are situated is this :—Lord and Lady Western are here for the summer, I fear, and the odious Dalrymples ; then the assizes are coming on, and we are to have those stupid old Judges, and the High Sheriff, and half-a-dozen Dabzacs, as a matter of course ; I don't expect to survive it, I assure you ; but, my dear Sydney, if all this does not frighten you as it does me, do come down, I entreat ; indeed, I do so want somebody to support me ; I hardly dare promise you a bed, but you would put up with a

sofa, I am sure, for the sake of being near me ; and recollect, Sydney, you have not been my guest since I was married. Colonel Dabzac begs to join me in all I have said, and in condolences upon the late melancholy, but, I hope, instructive event.

“ Your ever dear sister,

“ ARABELLA DABZAC.

“ To Sydney Spenser, Esq.”

&c., &c., &c.

The truth was, that Mrs. Dabzac figured Sydney to herself as she had last seen him at her father's house, dressing, talking, laughing, blustering, and swaggering like Dudley Dawson ; she had no idea how effectually the tailors of Cambridge had brushed up his exterior, and its society rubbed down his manners ; how the consciousness of owing large instead of paltry sums had quieted and dignified his bearing ; how familiar he had grown with expensive luxuries and fashionable occupations ; with the systems, nomenclatures, and usages of the great world, or she would not have been ashamed to present

her brother to Lord and Lady Western and the odious Dalrymples.

Sydney forwarded his sister's letter to his father, as his excuse for not going to Dabzac House; but the rector had surely distress enough without the additional pang of a daughter's heartlessness.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE EXPLOSION.

“ Oh, what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through sorrow, through glory, through
shame.” MOORE.

THE gold offered by the Castle operated quickly—only too quickly. Vivyan, returning from the Peninsula, found his Elizabeth the sister of a denounced criminal, and a fugitive from the hands of justice.

The curate, whose strong keen eye was always on the watch under his beetling brows for opportunities of doing his fellow-creatures some service, or saving them from some harm (a faithful shepherd, if ever a flock had one), observed prowling about the neighbourhood of Redcross, soon after his return home, a stranger, whose features, at

once profoundly melancholy and expressive of hardened guilt, exercised a painful fascination upon him. Once or twice he met him hanging about the post-office, and he asked Mrs. Peacock if she knew who he was, and what was his business in the town. She answered promptly that she believed he was a poor young artist, who had come down to sketch the scenery on the coast. This was plausible, but still Hercules kept his eye upon him ; probably thinking that it was not the pencil which had drawn those deep lines in the stranger's cheeks, nor the fine arts which had given him that air of pensive profligacy. Upon one occasion it happened that the curate was walking with Mr. Spenser (the first day the poor rector had been prevailed on to take the air), when this remarkable yet mean personage crossed their path.

“ Of what age would you take him to be ? ” said Hercules.

“ Young,” said the rector ; “ but age is not altogether measured by years.”

“ A young man and an old scoundrel, I should say,” added the curate.

They re-entered the curate's house (for the Spensers had not returned to the parsonage, nor was it their intention to do so for some time), and sat down to a homely dinner. Time was when the homeliest dinner in that house was a happy one; but now the faces were sad and the voices spoke with effort. Mr. Spenser was mourning both as a husband and a father; Elizabeth had also her complicated grief; Carry's big heart was bursting with solicitude for them both; and Hercules was all tenderness to every body in his own rugged colossal way. Their sorrow at that moment resembled one of those sombre masses of vapour that so often brooded in calm wet weather over the mountains of the region, mists which poured down steady rain, and involved every object in the landscape in dense but serene obscurity. How different was it after the blow which followed! In the course of that same evening, a gentleman with whom both Mr. Spenser and Mr. Woodward

were slightly acquainted, a magistrate of the county, rode up to the gate of the court-yard. He solicited a private interview with the rector, who received him in the curate's study.

Thomson had that morning tendered informations on oath against Sydney Spenser.

It is almost unnecessary to state that the outrage had been actually committed by the two fellows who had been employed at Castle-Dawson, in aiding and abetting its proprietor in a lawless proceeding of another character. We have seen that one of those fellows, Lamb, had already been sent out of the country; and Dawson would have gladly disposed of Thomson in the same way, but he was not successful in inducing him to expatriate himself. His last attempt had been on the late occasion, when Sydney had accidentally witnessed their meeting by night in London. Whether Thomson had followed Dawson over to Ireland, or had returned to that country in search of another job, is uncertain, but he was in Dublin when the reward was offered, and its first effect

was to agitate and alarm him exceedingly, for he did not know what had become of his accomplice, and the lively faith he had in Lamb's villany assured him that no time would be lost on his part in turning approver to clutch the money. Haunted by this well-founded apprehension, he accidentally met with Mr. Sharkey, his old employer, and from him he learned the fact that Lamb was gone to improve his fortunes and morality amongst the Yankees. How devoutly Thomson then wished that they had been a party of three at the Black Castle, that he might have had somebody to transport and make three hundred pounds by. Brooding still on the money, he recollected that he had met a man on the night of the robbery, and near the scene of it, whose features he thought he would recall if he was to meet him again. Acting on this hint from the author of all roguery, he crept by tortuous ways to Red-cross. He had personated an artist at Castle-Dawson to blind Sydney Spenser, and he now resumed the same easily-supported cha-

racter; it only required a portfolio, a scrap of chalk, and a few terms of art gleaned from a penny cyclopædia. Ned Grogan (the man who saw Sydney that night in the neighbourhood of the old castle) had a narrow escape, for it was he who had been seen by Thomson, and whom the miscreant would infallibly have sacrificed, had he not been diverted from that scheme by accidentally falling in with his old acquaintance, Mrs. Peacock. Thomson had not been many days in the society of the unprincipled and revengeful Lucy, before he abandoned his designs against Grogan, and (having the benefit of all the information which the post-mistress had collected, not only from the gossip of the town, but from official sources) determined to fly at higher game. It was equal to him, of course, whether he earned the reward of the Government, or extorted the money from Mr. Spenser; and it was probably in the latter way that he reckoned upon securing his object.

To Elizabeth there was nothing to break

the shock occasioned by the explosion of this "infernal machine;" the other members of the family had been in some slight degree prepared; at least, as far as knowing that malicious people had for some time been making free with Sydney's character, and that there was a singular concurrence of circumstances to support a charge against him; but to his sister the first disclosure came in its last and most appalling shape; she fell with a harrowing shriek into Carry's arms, and Hercules carried her, almost lifeless, to her room.

That same night, at a late hour, a travelling-carriage arrived at the principal inn of the town. The handsome young man, browned by southern suns, who alighted from it, was Frank Vivyan. What fearful changes had taken place since he had been last in Redcross! But the saddest change of all was, that his return gave his Elizabeth no joy, but, on the contrary, made her sorrows more hard to bear.

He returned not to be a comforter, for

dishonour admits of no solace; and alike incapable of performing the active offices of a friend, for the case seemed equally beyond the reach of friendship. He came back, too,—in what a harrowing relation to herself! Elizabeth's share in the misfortune was the largest and bitterest of all.

Mrs. Woodward, knowing the force of her niece's character perfectly, was fully prepared for the determination to which she came in the first moment of recovered self-possession—to cancel her engagement to Vivyan. Mrs. Woodward communicated this inevitable result to the miserable young man before Elizabeth had directly alluded to the subject. In fact, so clearly did the noble-minded girl see the path which duty and high-minded love pointed out to her—so plain did the road to be taken lie before her, shining in the bright sun of honour—that her resolution to tread it was rather implied than expressed in her conversation, and Carry was not slower to divine, than her niece was to form, a right and high-souled purpose.

Vivyan, on his side, would have thought himself the blackest and most heartless traitor, had any guilt of Sydney's, whatever its amount, or how clear soever its demonstration, led him for one moment to waver in his devotion to Elizabeth. Some days elapsed before she was strong enough to support the severe trial of an interview with him. These days were passed by Vivyan in no company but that of Mrs. Woodward, for the rector and his brother-in-law had gone up to Dublin to be directed by professional advice as to the conduct to be pursued with respect to their son and nephew. Vivyan never doubted Sydney's innocence for a moment. Every circumstance attending the charge seemed a complete answer to it,—the nature of the accusation—the position of the accused—he might well have added the character of the accuser, as well as his personal appearance, had he been acquainted with either. All these topics were urged by Vivyan over and over again in long interviews with Mrs. Woodward.

“ But, as to myself and Elizabeth,” he repeatedly added, “ let the issue of this unfortunate business be what it may, it does not alter our affections, and it cannot and must not prevent our union.”

“ Cherish no such hope, I implore you, Mr. Vivyan,” replied Mrs. Woodward, who was already beginning to show in her cheek, and her diminished figure, the outward signs of sorrow and anxiety—“ Elizabeth’s love is too pure, too elevated, to suffer you, in the violence of your attachment, to connect yourself with a dishonoured family. Oh, no, nothing now but the most complete vindication of her brother in the face of the world, and in the eyes of the law—in fact, nothing but the discovery and conviction of the actual offenders—if, indeed, my unfortunate nephew is innocent—” Her voice and her tears fell at the torturing thought that it might be otherwise.

“ Innocent! of course he is,” cried Vivyan, taking her hand with affectionate warmth; “ none of *us*, at least, have a doubt of it.”

“Alas, my husband has,” said Carry, and, no longer controlling her grief, wept abundantly.

Before Elizabeth was able to receive Vivyan, the rector and curate returned from Dublin. Sydney had been sent to Canada. It was the result of a consultation with an eminent lawyer and an old friend of the family, who, having had all the circumstances of the case before him, and viewed it in all its bearings, formed the adverse opinion upon which Mr. Spenser immediately acted.

Strong suspicion also fell at the same time upon Dawson. Indeed, the impression upon the mind of the lawyer was that Sydney had committed the crime at the instigation of his dangerous associate; in fact, that Sydney had been what is commonly called a cat's-paw in the transaction. Dawson had been invited to be present at the secret inquiry, but had excused himself on the plea of urgent parliamentary business, whereas in truth he was apprehensive of being cross-examined inconveniently as to the character and real

employment of Thomson and Lamb. Besides, he had no direct evidence to give which could have been of use to young Spenser. The only way in which he could possibly have served him would have been by destroying Thomson's credit, which no man could have done more effectually, but he would have destroyed himself at the same time.

But Sydney had damaged his own case from first to last by his fatal deviations from truth. He reserved to the eleventh hour the statement that he had received the bank-note, which he had paid to Mr. Hogg, the sexton, from the hands of Thomson himself. There was no corroboration of this assertion, and he had previously assured his uncle that he had no recollection whatever of the way into which the note came into his possession. Again, he prevaricated with respect to the arms in the same suicidal manner. He had disowned the pistol found by Markham, a suspicious circumstance in itself; but when a solemn address from the lawyer extorted

from him the other fact, that he had thrown its fellow into the loch, his unhappy relatives hung their heads down ; the inquiry was considered at an end, and the unfortunate young man was sensible himself that he had no longer any support but the unavailing consciousness of his own innocence. " It is possible," said the lawyer, privately to Mr. Woodward, " it is possible that your nephew may not be guilty ; the crime may, in fact, have been committed by the fellow who now appears to accuse him ; but your nephew has done so much to give his case the aspect of criminality, and deprive himself of the benefit of character, that I cannot recommend you to trust to the verdict of a jury. My advice is, to send him out of the country before informations are sworn, after which it may be too late."

Elizabeth and Vivyan met. Her resolution, taken in the depths of her sorrow, and conceived in the spirit of the purest and most disinterested love (the love that prizes not its own gratification, but the happiness,

and above all, the honour of the loved object), never wavered for a moment. Its strength consisted in the very excess of its delicacy and tenderness; never did woman need the support of a lover and a husband more than in the circumstances under which this generous girl stedfastly declined it; never was more fervent attachment, more passionate remonstrance, brought to bear upon a woman's purpose, to warp her from it. It was the contest of two spirits of the truest love, the struggle of two rival principles of the finest honour;—Elizabeth prevailed."

"No, dearest Frank," she said, with the sweetest sadness; "I shall always love you, only not in the character to which I formerly aspired."

He urged, and urged in vain, that love's trial was in the storms and vicissitudes of life, and that she was robbing love of its best privilege, by repelling its sympathy and protection at a moment when both were most needful.

“ Oh! Frank,” she answered, “ if this were a misfortune which I ought to share with you, if it were only poverty, if it were any thing but disgrace, do you think I would have come to this decision ?”

“ Dearest Elizabeth,” he replied, “ I will not hear you talk of disgrace. There is a mystery unexplained, that is all that can be said; I still believe firmly that your brother is innocent as I am ; the criminal is his accuser, or Dawson himself ; but at all events, does dishonour touch you ?—oh, you talk of dishonouring me, and yet you would deprive me of the only honour I seek, all I am ambitious of,—that of calling you my wife.”

“ Ah,” she answered, “ with what delight I once listened to that language, and from you did not call it flattery ; but how can I now deceive myself? I am no longer an object of ambition, but only, only—of pity.”

“ Only of love, nothing but devoted and eternal love,” cried Vivyan, clasping her in his arms. “ How can you talk of separation,

dearest girl, when I know your love is unchanged."

"Unchanged it is, indeed," she answered; "unchanged and unchangeable. Alas! I love you too well to marry you."

From that determination neither tears nor eloquence, persuasion nor argument, could make her swerve. Vivyan's last appeal was founded upon the unfavourable inference which the world would draw from the breaking-off of their marriage; but Elizabeth had taken her stand upon a clear broad principle of conduct, and all considerations of a secondary nature were pressed upon her to no purpose.

They met once more, and Vivyan went abroad soon after, miserable himself, and leaving those he loved best in the world in misery behind him.

B O O K IX.

C H A P T E R L V.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

“Oh, Goneril,
You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face ; I fear your disposition.”

LEAR.

THE world talked with its usual flippancy, impertinence, ignorance, and often malice, of the reverses of the Spensers. The great world in London and Dublin gossipped pretty much in the same style as the little world in Redcross. People judged every thing without knowing much about any thing ; and arranged what every body was to do, and the relative duties and obligations of every member of the family precisely as

if they constituted a tribunal fully informed upon the whole of the case, and authorised to pronounce a decree settling the rights and responsibilities of all the parties. Most co-teries agreed that the Spensers must quarter themselves upon somebody, or at least distribute themselves among their rich friends and relations ; Elizabeth was to go to the Ramsdens, the children were to be taken by the Woodward, and Mr. Spenser himself would naturally devolve upon his married, wealthy, and favourite daughter, Mrs. Dabzac. This was all very nice and comfortable ; but you may be certain many things were said by the world, in the course of these arrangements, which were not altogether so good-natured.

“ I am not quite so sure,” observed Lady Brabble, for instance, “ that the Ramsdens will like to have Elizabeth Spenser again, after this very awkward affair about her brother ; Mrs. Ramsden is very particular, and I really cannot blame her, as she has daughters.”

"I know, for my own part," said old Mrs. Loquax, "I always judge girls by their brothers; it's a principle I have always acted on, and I advise every body to do the same."

"Then, you know, that was all extremely unpleasant about that terrible Mr. Dawson; and I'm told it's going on still," said Miss Vallancey, a wickedly virtuous old maid.

"Mr. Spenser, I'm told, is going abroad," said Lady Brabble.

"I can't tell you how I pity him," said Lady Towser; "at the same time, he has brought it all on himself, poor man; there's no denying it."

"Oh, I should think nothing about it, Lady Towser, if it had happened in any other family but that of a clergyman," said the godly Miss Vallancey. "Things like this give the enemies of religion such a handle."

"By-the-bye," said Lady Brabble, "talking of the Spensers, reminds me of the Dabzacs;—we are going down to them next week—what a dear good creature *she* is, and how much she is to be pitied."

This is just a specimen of the way in which the Dublin world discussed the affairs of the Spensers, shooting their poisoned little shafts at random, in morning visits, and the talkative corners of ball-rooms.

The Spensers did not quarter themselves any where, at least in the free and easy sense in which the Dublin ladies used the word. They certainly quartered themselves in no sense at all upon the Ramsdens, or even upon the Dabzacs. If they lived at free quarters any where at all for a short time, it was under the humble roof of the plain curate of Redcross, the roof which he was wont to repair with his own hands, when the storms stripped it.

As to Mrs. Dabzac, she wrote, indeed, several rigmarole letters, in the style of her epistle to Sydney, full of anxieties and tendernesses, commiserations and remembrances, but she never invited either her father or sister to her house, angelical as Lady Brabble pronounced her. Arabella, however, had

excuses as plenty as blackberries for not doing what a daughter of any feeling would have done under the circumstances. Perhaps they did not altogether impose upon the rector; but if he questioned their validity he was silent upon the subject.

He had a child, however, who did not fail him in his troubles, who stuck the closer to him the more the tempest raged and the storms of life buffeted him.

"You have a daughter left, Val," said Hercules, when Mr. Spenser was speaking of his reduced circumstances, "who has worth enough to make any man who possesses her a Cræsus."

"Yes," said the rector, "Elizabeth has always done her duty."

"Nobody has lost so much as she has," said the curate.

So in truth it was; but minds that are strong and good are supported by trial under trial; the very variety of their afflictions sustains them. They are like the strong-rooted tree of the forest, which many winds

conspire to overthrow, but which remain upright, though shaken, by the very conflict of the opposing blasts.

Those who saw the parsonage in a few months after the calamities recorded in the previous book witnessed a melancholy revolution there. The house was shut up; its furniture had been sold; the rector's pictures, bronzes, busts, and what he valued and regretted most of all, his select and beautiful library, with its curiously carved oaken bookcases, had been removed to Dublin, and were destined to the hammer, to satisfy the demands of his son's Cambridge creditors, and discharge his other pecuniary obligations. The horses and carriages had been disposed of; even the old black mare on which Carry Woodward used to sit so portly; and the Gipsy was no more to be seen moored alongside the little pier.

The curate did not let the books go without a vigorous effort to save them.

"All nonsense, Carry," he said, "the books can't be sold; it is impossible; I have turned

it all over in my mind ; his daughter will never allow it."

Carry looked surprised, thinking that he meant Elizabeth.

"Not allow it, my dear Hercules !—she is perfectly resigned on that as upon every other subject."

"I'm not talking of Lizzy, Carry,—I'm talking of Arabella, Mrs. Dabzac."

"Well, my love," said Carry, regarding him with curiosity, not knowing what he was driving at, "What of Mrs. Dabzac?"

"Why," said Hercules, "only that she is his daughter, and was always his favourite; I cannot but think, if she knew the actual state of his affairs, she would at least redeem his library,—if Val had only his books he would weather the storm."

"My dear good Hercules," cried his wife, smiling affectionately on him, in a way that clearly intimated her opinion that he was much too simple for a man of his years. He perfectly understood her looks, and vociferated, slapping his thigh,

“Why, Carry, she is not a Goneril, or a Regan.”

“Very far from a Cordelia,” said Carry. “Why, my dear, not to speak of her recent behaviour to her father himself, her very conduct to you—I mean the way she acted at her marriage—might show you how little is to be expected from her.”

“Come, Carry, love, let by-gones be by-gones; I have forgiven her long ago. She probably thought that a bishop would tie the knot faster than a curate, and perhaps she was right. That is no reason for denying her the common feelings of a daughter for a father.”

At day-break the next morning, Hercules rose, saddled Sligo with his own hands, and set out on a long journey across the country, taking the line of road that led to the county of Armagh. The reader may think it strange to see him bestriding Sligo again, as he had sold that redoubted steed to Doctor Wilkins for twenty pounds; but Sligo was a pony who had a will of his own, and whether it was that he preferred divinity to physic, or had

X *He was a very good pony*

grown so attached to his old shed in the curate's yard, that he could not make himself comfortable anywhere else, certain it was that the doctor could get no good of him; for, whenever he found the stable door open, or had any opportunity of making his escape, he invariably trotted back to his former abode, and was found with his nose against the latch, as if trying to raise it and let himself in. After this had happened several times, Doctor Wilkins thought he might as well convey him formally to his ancient master, but he stedfastly refused to take back the twenty pounds, insisting that he bought the pony, subject to all his faults and eccentricities.

Dabzac House was a spacious, gray, formal building, with a story more than a country-house ought to have; it looked cold and ceremonious; there was a dull square piece of water in front of it, with two stiff swans lazily navigating it; the trees and shrubs seemed to have been trimmed by a carpenter, and the only flowers to be seen were holly-

hocks and orange lilies. The house was just now full of company. A great many frigid and fashionable people were gathered together, the personages enumerated in Mrs. Dabzac's letter to Sydney, and several more whom she had not referred to, including two or three lieutenant-colonels and grand masters.

Arabella, habited in graceful and almost gay mourning, was standing, shortly before dinner, at a window, chatting with the Honourable John Dalrymple and the Honourable Tom Flinch; they were talking of Cambridge, and Arabella had been actually boasting of her brother's extravagant career there (that having been the cause publicly assigned for Sydney's abrupt expatriation), when with horror indescribable she espied her uncle riding up the rigid avenue, between the regular rows of beeches.

"Whom have we go there?" said the Honourable Tom, the first to call attention to the approaching curiosity.

"I think," said the Honourable John, "it must be Dominie Sampson."

“Or Doctor Johnson *redivivus*,” said the other.

Arabella was a little short-sighted, though in the present instance she had been the first to descry her relative, and she now reconnoitred him through her eye-glass, just to gain time to arrange her ideas. While she was doing so, Colonel Dabzac came to the window, and instantly recognised his wife’s uncle.

“Can it be possible?—really I believe Dabzac is right—my uncle, my dear good odd uncle,” exclaimed his amiable niece, with her little affected simper.

The colonel went out instantly to receive Mr. Woodward with his habitual starched civility, but still as became a gentleman in his own house. Arabella received him, too, with a great deal more warmth in her manner than she really felt, and yet she looked any thing but cordial.

The Honourables John and Tom were too well bred to jest any more on the curate’s personal appearance, now that he proved to

be a relation of the family, but they saw in a twinkling that their hostess was disconcerted by the new arrival, and despised her vulgarity of mind much more than they did the curate's coat.

Hercules had all the great points that constitute the true gentleman. He was independent and unselfish, respected others, and respected himself; he knew his position, and though no man had a higher sense than he had of the dignity of a minister of the gospel, no man knew better the practical difference in society between the opulent drones and the indigent working-bees of the hive. As a clergyman, and a relative of Mrs. Dabzac, he was received respectfully by the company, who were accustomed to the homely manners of the northern clergy, and did not want to be assured that Hercules was a plain blunt man and an eccentricity, points that were repeatedly pressed by his niece.

As the people began to assemble before dinner, the Honourable John said to the Honourable Tom,

“Do you know, Tom, this is the first time, to my knowledge, that I was ever in the same room with a curate.”

“Well,” replied the Honourable Tom, “I have no recollection whether I ever met a curate before, but I was once in the same room with an attorney.”

“That must have been very unpleasant,” drawled his brother coxcomb.

Lady Brabble observed to Lady Western that she was positive Mrs. Dabzac wished her uncle in Jericho.

“Dear me,” exclaimed Lady Western, and being a little deaf, she began to examine Mr. Woodward very attentively, under the impression that he was a missionary, just returned from the city named by Lady Brabble.

When dinner was announced, Hercules was amazed. He had dined on the road, at two o'clock, and had purposely delayed his arrival at Dabzac House to an hour when he thought that dinner would be over, having no notion of spunging on his niece for more than a tea

and a night's lodging. An eight o'clock dinner had never entered into his calculations, and he had hardly made up his mind whether the announcement was serious, ere he found himself seated at a pompous banquet, with the deaf Lady Western on one side of him, and the Honourable Tom Flinch on the other. Hercules was called on to say grace, and his performance of that office drew all eyes upon him, it was at once so brief and so devout, so energetic and sonorous. Lady Western began immediately to attack him about his travels in Palestine. She was particularly inquisitive about Jericho, and it was to no purpose the curate explained over and over again, that though he took the greatest interest in the part of the globe she was talking of, his only knowledge of it was from the Bible and books of travels. At length he gave up the contest, and suffered her ladyship to take him for an oriental missionary during the rest of the evening.

With the Honourable Tom he got on capitally. Tom took good care of him, though

he puzzled him a little with dry champagne; but the best of it was, that Tom turned out to be an aide-de-camp to the Lord-Lieutenant, and the identical officer who, after the curate's sermon at the Castle Chapel, had been commissioned to invite him to the viceroial table.

Mrs. Dabzac was in hopes of concealing her uncle's humble position in the church under the general denomination of a country clergyman, but she was not successful in this little manœuvre. Mr. Pepper and Lord Brabble began to talk of the state of the country; and the distress of the clergy being alluded to, Lord Brabble said he believed very few clergymen were receiving the half of their incomes, "as, I dare say, you know very well, sir," he added, addressing himself to Hercules.

"Not by my own personal experience, my lord," replied Mr. Woodward.

"Then your income is paid; you are a lucky man," said Mr. Pepper.

"I never received my seventy-five more regularly," said the curate, in a tone that

reached the four corners of the table; and if he had taken up a decanter, and flung it at his niece's head, he could hardly have shocked her more than by his blunt mention of the sum which, being the exact arithmetical symbol of curacy, at once dispersed all the obscurity that belonged to the phrase "country clergyman."

Several people present (Lord Brabble and Tom Flinch, for instance) liked Hercules all the more for his honest speech, but some looked scornful, and Arabella herself devoutly wished him at the place from which Lady Western insisted on believing him just returned.

It seemed, however, as if the presence of a poor working clergyman had the effect of a wet blanket on the company in general, for there was no more conversation until the ladies were gone, and then it took an acrimonious political turn, which brought forth the curate again, and afforded him an opportunity of reading the grand-masters and grand-secretaries a lecture which they did not soon

forget. He told them, that if they could not reconcile peace and charity with their orange principles, the sooner they plucked the orange ribbons from their coats the better ; that bad as the Pope was, there was another spiritual personage against whom Christians ought to be still more on their guard ; that they were to purify politics with religion, not defile religion with politics ; that he detested popery as much, he hoped, as any man could, but that he utterly despaired of smothering it with orange lilies, or bawling and drumming it out of the country. This speech caused a general set to be made upon the curate, who had need of all his prowess to sustain his numerous assailants. Colonel Dabzac said, drily, that he had heard Mr. Woodward was one of themselves.

“ My principles are orange, sir,” replied Hercules ; “ but I am very far from approving of the doings of a great many of our party.”

“ Pray which of our doings do you disapprove of ?” asked Mr. Pepper, sneeringly.

“As I was riding here, this day,” said the curate, “I passed a church ten miles from this, and I saw an orange flag floating from the steeple. I disapprove of that, sir; I disapprove of it mightily;—that, sir, is what I call defiling religion with politics.”

“Is that all you have to find fault with?” asked Lord Brabble.

“No, nor the half, my lord,” answered Hercules, roundly. “I don’t like your orange lodges, what you call your organisation; I don’t see the sense, and still less do I see the grandeur of it. Grand men ought to be above meeting in holes and corners. I don’t like secrecy, my lord. What legitimate object is there which may not be achieved by proceedings in the face of the world? The presumption is, and will always be, that when men enter secret associations, whether in Tanderagee, or in Tipperary, their objects are of a nature that look better in a weak light than a strong one. And another reason, my lord, is this, that if *we* have our John Knox lodge, and our Beresford lodge, depend upon

it the time will come when others will have their Emmet clubs and Wolfe Tone clubs. I disapprove of all such bodies, whether the ribbon is green or orange; they are all capable of doing mischief, and the best of them can possibly do no good."

"Myuncle's a fine fellow," said the Honourable Tom to the Honourable John, as they both moved together from the dining-room.

"Devilish fine," said the Honourable John, heartily weary of the political squabble, during which the wine had been kept standing half an hour before Lord Brabble.

Hercules thought the rest of the evening dreadfully tedious, so anxious was he to have a private conference with his niece, who, upon her part, was equally fidgety to learn what could possibly have brought him to her house, and not undisturbed by shabby suspicions that his visit was connected with the distressed affairs of her family.

At length the drawing-room was left to themselves, and Arabella, throwing herself on a sofa, in affected exhaustion, uttered a

kind of thanksgiving for being at length delivered from the odious Dalrymples and that insupportable Lady Western.

“How I did pity you, my dear uncle,” she said, with her counterfeit earnestness; “a clever man like you seated between that prosy old woman, and an absolute idiot like Tom Flinch.”

“He seems a very good-natured young man,” said Hercules; “he was very obliging and attentive to me at dinner.”

“Oh, but, sir, I should have so liked to have had you all to myself; we have so many things to talk about.”

“So many things, Arabella, and such sad things,” said Hercules, with deep solemnity, seating himself at her side.

“Sad, sad indeed,” said his niece; “I can’t tell you, sir, how distressing it is to be obliged to receive all this company at such a time.” And, as she spoke, she raised the corner of her little handkerchief of snowy gauze, to receive any pearly tribute which

her eyes might be disposed to pay to the claims of sympathy and kindred.

Arabella looked, spoke, and dressed sorrow very respectably. Black lace, white cambric, and downcast eye-lids do a great deal; besides we all know what an advantage a handsome Mrs. Haller or Mrs. Beverley has over a plain one. Arabella imposed upon her uncle, and yet he found it no easy matter to bring the conversation to the desired point. At length he found what he thought a tolerably fair opening—

“I suppose you have heard,” he said, “that it has been found necessary to dispose of the furniture and other property at the parsonage.”

Arabella answered in the affirmative with a most touching expression of regret.

“The furniture—plate—pictures—horses—carriages”—repeated Hercules, detailing the items of poor Mr. Spenser’s sacrifices.

“Not the books!” exclaimed Mrs. Dabzac, interrupting him; “my poor father always set such a very high value on his library.”

Hercules was overjoyed ; his niece was actually anticipating the object of his mission. He hastened to tell her that the books were not yet disposed of, and, for the first time in his life, fondled down her stately name from Arabella to Bell.

“It was only this very morning,” she added, “the colonel and I were talking on this very subject.”

Hercules seized both her small white hands with his huge brown ones, and could almost have knelt to her.

“We were saying,” she added, “that the book-cases alone would produce several hundred pounds at a London auction.”

Hercules dropped her hands as if her fingers were adders. He was expecting her pretty mouth to drop pearls and diamonds, and it opened to let out reptiles. He gave a very loose and unsatisfactory account of the remainder of his interview with Mrs. Dabzac. Carry concluded that he had given too loose a rein to his indignant emotions. Certain it was that he left Dabzac House the following

morning long before breakfast, and arrived at Redcross the same night, a ride almost as remarkable as Turpin's.

"She's a Regan, Carry ; she's a Goneril," he exclaimed, rushing into his study, where his wife was sitting up for him alone. For a full half hour he continued repeating, "A Regan, a Goneril;" as he tugged off his boots and his coats, and flung them to all corners of the room.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE MICROSCOPE.

“Oh, coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!”

RICHARD III.

THE Spensers continued for a considerable time the guests of the Woodwards, and fortunately the crazy old white house was elastic, or it would not have answered the demands now made upon it by the consolidation of the two families. Though Dabzac House was not open to the rector in his adversity, many more agreeable mansions were, both in Ireland and England; but it did not suit his depressed spirits to make tours of visits; and Elizabeth, in the spirit of retrenchment, had taken upon herself the education of her little brothers and sisters, which was an additional reason for remaining stationary and retired.

A happy domestic revolution it was to the little Spensers, after the negligent tyranny of Mrs. Peacock. The boudoir of an affectionate and accomplished sister was now their school-room; they were instructed by the lips of beauty, and governed by the hand of love. Carry called it the golden age of Queen Bess, and Hercules said it was a little 1688, the greatest era in his chronology.

The death of Lady Bonham, while it added to Miss Spenser's sorrows, produced an unexpected change in the arrangements of the family. Lord Bonham went abroad immediately after his loss; but, before he went, prevailed upon Mr. Spenser to settle himself for some time at his shooting lodge, in the mountains to the north of the parsonage. It was painful to leave the Woodward's, but the rector felt that he had been long enough a burden to his curate; and another consideration, of a totally different kind, disposed Elizabeth also to accept the offer of Bonham Lodge. Her deceased friend had left three children of a tender age, who were now at the lodge, under the care of a person in whom Miss

Spenser knew that Lord Bonham placed but little confidence. The idea of being useful to these little ones immediately occurred to her, for her mind was something like her good uncle's house, it was always so ready to expand itself for any number of new virtues or new duties.

As to Carry Woodward, she was more satisfied upon the whole than displeased at this new turn of events, for she knew that her niece required all the support of constant and engrossing occupations through her complicated trials; Mrs. Woodward's own experience told her how little time maternal offices leave for brooding on recollections, or indulging fancies; and she encouraged and applauded Elizabeth's benevolent resolution, as the wisest she could possibly take in her present circumstances.

The idle and talkative women of Dublin (for there were a few such women in that capital at the period of these events) took a different view of the matter.

"It's easy to talk," said Lady Brabble to

Mrs. Pepper, "of Lord Bonham being Mr. Spenser's old college acquaintance; there's no disguising the fact, that Miss Spenser is going to Bonham Lodge in the capacity of a governess; the world will look upon it in no other light, at all events."

"I'm told Lord Bonham is to allow her fifty pounds a-year," said Miss Vallancy.

"Don't you pity poor pretty Mrs. Dabzac, with such relations—such a brother and such a sister?" said Lady Towser.

"It's positively beginning to affect her spirits and her looks, poor thing," said another member of the group.

"I foresaw what it would end in, when I heard of the scrapes the brother got into," said old Mrs. Loquax; "my rule is always to judge of girls by their brothers."

But, undeterred by the slanderous gossip of her sex, Elizabeth Spenser entered upon her enlarged sphere of usefulness, and in the employment of the present laboured to forget the griefs and the impressions of the past. It was a lovely September morning when the

Spensers parted in tears from their affectionate relatives, and at a late hour in the evening of the same day they reached their new abode.

Bonham Lodge was situated in an angle of the coast, about a mile from the beach. The mountains were piled about it in fantastic masses, possessing every variety of picturesque attraction that wood, rock, heath, and water, with their infinite combinations, could give them. The house was a cottage in form, but had some excellent rooms, and was built in the massive style that the stormy character of the coast rendered indispensable for stability and safety. Being comfortably furnished, and so charmingly situated, it was a most desirable place to pass a few weeks at, particularly at the season when the Spensers went there ; and Mrs. Woodward was wont to say, that the only thing against it was the circumstance that the only road by which it was accessible from Redcross was also the road to Castle Dawson.

But it was now a good while since the proprietor of that dismal mansion had presumed

to molest Elizabeth ; she had almost ceased to think of him, and little dreamed of the fresh persecution that even now, in her grief and solitude, was impending over her. Little did the rector dream that he was actually connected himself with Dawson in the most unpleasant way ; namely, as his debtor for a considerable sum of money. The reader will recollect the loan which Sharkey, the attorney, had negotiated for Mr. Spenser ; the money had been found by Dawson, and the rector had accepted bills, which Dawson held not only as securities for the repayment, but (as he sordidly and vaguely calculated) as a means of influencing the daughter through the father's difficulties. In this scheme, however, he was baffled by the curious train of circumstances which we have now to relate.

When the bills were about to fall due, (which was soon after the removal to Bonham Lodge), Mr. Spenser was but ill-prepared to meet them, and wrote to Mr. Sharkey with a view to procure renewals, or, in other words, to postpone the period of payment. Dawson was pinched for

money at the time quite as much as the rector was ; indeed, it was nothing but the desperate state of his affairs which, engrossing all his thoughts, had so long protected Miss Spenser from his attentions ; but he could not resist the temptation now thrown in his way of at once revealing himself as Mr. Spenser's benefactor, and confirming his hold by preserving that generous character still longer. The rector's surprise and Elizabeth's horror were extreme, when Sharkey's reply disclosed who the owner of the bills really was. The affair was managed adroitly enough by both worthy solicitor and worthy client. The former communicated Mr. Spenser's request to the latter ; the latter wrote to the former, cordially agreeing to the proposal, and graciously offering any accommodation the rector desired ; then Mr. Sharkey forwarded the substance of this interesting correspondence to Bonham Lodge, not without the expression of a fear that Mr. Dawson would be displeased at having his name made known in the transaction. It was no easy matter to unriddle

Mr. Sharkey's writing, he wrote such an execrable hand; and to this circumstance the rector owed his escape from the trap laid for him, for he was obliged to call in the aid of his daughter to read the letter, and she fell at her father's knees almost swooning, when at last she decyphered the name of Dawson.

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, recovering herself, "do not put yourself under any further obligation to that man; surely you are not driven to have recourse to such assistance."

In the most earnest and touching manner was this petition made, and the amiable rector loved her too tenderly to refuse it, although his constitutional weakness, and the facility of renewing an old negotiation, would probably have led him to continue Dawson's debtor, had not this fortunate accident happened to prevent it. He wrote that day, nay that very hour, (for Elizabeth anxiously pressed him,) to thank Mr. Dawson for his kindness in grateful terms, declining, however, to avail himself of it, on the ground that altered cir-

cumstances made it desirable to him to close the transaction. How to raise the money to pay the bills was then the next question, and while both father and daughter were deliberating on that point, and taking such steps as seemed most adviseable, a man rode up to the lodge, mounted on a strong white horse;—it was Dawson himself.

A great alteration had taken place not only in his position, but in his personal appearance, since the last time the rector saw him. The portrait we drew of him in a former volume must now be retouched. He was no longer the picture of robust vice, and immorality with a good digestion. Anxiety was ploughing his forehead, and delving hollows in his cheeks; even his carbuncles were beginning to pale, though intemperance supplied their fires with even more than their former fuel. His eyes, however, had grown red, as if at the expense of his cheeks; they looked languid, as if sleep rarely visited their lids, yet watchful as if they momentarily expected the approach of an enemy, or the

explosion of a mine. How his position was altered will be related afterwards; it is sufficient to mention here that he was no longer a member of parliament.

Elizabeth fled, terrified, to her chamber, and immured herself there on the pretext of indisposition, firmly resolved not to appear as long as a visitor so detested haunted the house. He inflicted his bad company on the rector for three days, pressing his services upon him, and still hoping that Miss Spenser would come forth and receive his homage. It would be injustice, however, to Dawson, not to add that he was far from being unconcerned at the misfortunes that had befallen Sydney, and that he would have done any thing in his power, short of personal risk and exposure, to repair the evils of which he himself was so much the cause. It was even possible that he might have involved himself, by his feelings on this point, in admissions of a dangerous nature, had not the rector, on the first mention of his son's name, begged to be spared the fruitless discussion of a painful topic.

The seclusion of Elizabeth, and her firmness in maintaining it, embarrassed and mortified Dawson beyond measure. He scarcely refrained from making it a subject of complaint to the rector, but with all his assurance did not venture to hazard the rebuff to which such extreme presumption would have exposed him, even from Mr. Spenser. If ever Dawson felt distinctly and painfully the utter hopelessness of his pretensions, it was in the presence of the object of them, or in the society of her family. Still he was always courting the position in which he felt most humiliated. His pursuit of Elizabeth had all along been a sort of monomania, more or less active at particular times, according as circumstances chanced to excite it, or other passions more or less engaged him ; but its roots were deep, for it had its origin in his inordinate self-conceit, and for the same reason it was utterly incurable even by the strongest possible demonstrations of repugnance on the part of the lady. Otherwise the delusion would long ago have been dispelled. Such men

feel as if they were actually under recognizances to their own vanity never to take a repulse, or own that any woman has been found to resist their captivations. They have committed themselves to a hopeless adventure; possibly made their object notorious by boasting and swaggering amongst their associates; and they prefer the ostentation of vainly persisting, to the ridicule of pocketing all their affronts and going about their business. No consideration for the person, the peace of whose life is sacrificed in this barbarous and selfish game, ever enters the minds of the daring yet despicable coxcombs who play it.

Mr. Spenser had also been peremptory at first on the subject of the accommodation which his guest desired to force upon him; but on the morning of the third day, the answers he received from the parties to whom he had applied for assistance to discharge his obligations, proving extremely unfavourable, he began to waver in his resolution, and was on the point of violating the promise he had made to his

daughter, and again involving himself with Dawson, when the opportune arrival of the Woodwards (to pay their first visit to the lodge) changed the posture of affairs.

Great was the vexation of both the curate and his wife, but of Carry especially, when they found the rector entertaining a man whose presence was intolerable to his fair and virtuous daughter. Dawson was not in the house at the moment of their arrival, so they expressed their sentiments freely.

Carry went immediately to visit her niece in her captivity, and Mr. Spenser took his brother-in-law apart to put him in possession of the state of his affairs, and particularly the difficulty which immediately pressed him. Hercules no sooner cast his eye upon Mr. Sharkey's letter, than he cried out immediately that the hand-writing was the same as that on the paper which the police had found in the subterraneous chamber under the Black Castle.

"Carry has it in her pocket," he added ;

“she has kept it there ever since ; it will be curious to make the comparison.”

Hercules strode away to his wife, who came back with him ; the two papers were placed side by side, and the ascertained characters on the one serving to determine the doubtful ones on the other, not only the identity of the hands was placed beyond dispute, but it was also most satisfactorily established that the paper discovered in the vault was the envelope of some letter which Dawson had received from his attorney.

“Now,” said Mrs. Woodward, “if we could only decypher the writing in pencil on the other side!”

She had scarcely uttered the words, when the curate’s eye was attracted by a solar microscope which stood on a table near a window, where the rector had, that very morning, been exhibiting the seed of the fern and the blazonry of a butterfly’s wing to his little son. Hercules took the paper, placed it under the glasses, arranged the instrument properly, and the experiment

was so successful, that he actually read aloud the list, or inventory, of which it had already been suspected that the writing consisted. Amongst other things he came to the following item :—"Two marble busts"—upon which Mrs. Woodward instantly suggested that these might possibly be the busts found in the island, and at that moment in the rector's library at the parsonage.

"Whose hand is the inventory written in?" asked Mr. Spenser.

Carry applied her eye to the glass, and did not recognise it; Hercules failed also; then the rector looked himself, and pronounced it Dawson's, without a question.

Carry went off to communicate all this to her niece.

Almost at the same moment Dawson entered. Hercules had not met him since he had first changed his opinion of his character, in consequence of his stolen visit to Redcross, now two summers since. In the interval many things had occurred to corroborate the impression which that occurrence left upon the curate's

mind. Dawson quickly and keenly felt that Hercules was his friend no longer. There was no mistake about Woodward's manner; he never smiled when he was frowning inwardly; and when he took the hand of a man he despised or disliked, he never squeezed his fingers. He made Dawson extremely uncomfortable by the way in which he now received him, so clearly did it show that, for some cause or another, he had utterly forgotten the night on Loch Erne, and even the gallant saving of his niece's life. But worse was in store for the unwelcome guest. Wandering about the room he approached the microscope.

"We have just been trying its powers upon the faint writing on that scrap of paper," said Hercules, in tones as deep and hoarse as the murmur of the waves upon the neighbouring shore.

Dawson stooped and looked in. There he saw and recognised with the dismay that may be imagined a rough catalogue made with his own hand of the property of which he had rifled the creditors of his father's estate. His

posture prevented the rector and curate from remarking how the wonders of the microscope affected the muscles of his face, but no doubt they expressed a stronger feeling than that of a gratified philosophical observer.

“Extremely curious,” said Hercules, intently gazing in Dawson’s face, the instant he raised it from the glass.

“Extremely,” said the other, neither liking nor understanding the curate’s keen steady scrutiny.

Woodward then withdrew the paper, turned it up, as if without intention, and again fixing his alarming eye on the disconcerted profligate, addressed him, and said—

“By-the-bye, Mr. Dawson, this is a scrap of paper which the police found at the Black Castle—it seems to be the back of a letter—perhaps you can help us to read the writing.’

Now Dawson’s face turned all colours in less than a second ; and, divided between the fear of being frank and the danger of excessive caution, he pretended inability to decypher the address, but said, with an awkward

laugh and a husky voice, that the hand was not unlike his attorney's.

"So we were just saying," said the rector, in his quietest manner, but it cut Dawson as if with a stiletto ; for it made him apprehensive that some secret investigation or discussion was going on about his dark practices at Castle Dawson, and that the Spenser family knew much more than he wished of his secret history.

It was a relief to him when Mrs. Woodward entered. Her notice of him was studiously supercilious and unpleasant, for, in truth, she came down with a deliberately-formed resolution to drive him from the lodge before dinner ; but it did not deter him from hoping that she had found her niece better. Carry's reply was contemptuously inarticulate. Dawson, whom it was the hardest thing in the world to abash, persevered, and said he hoped Miss Spenser would soon be able to leave her room.

"She has no present intention of it," returned Mrs. Woodward ; not inaudibly, as

before, but with the utmost possible distinctness, and in a tone that left no doubt whatsoever as to the meaning of her words.

Dawson mounted his white horse and went almost as abruptly as he came. The house looked brighter and the air felt purer when he was gone. Elizabeth came forth from her hiding-place, and instantly placed a letter in her father's hands, which relieved him from the embarrassment of his obligation to her persecutor. She had been more successful in her financial operations than the rector. No sooner did he consent upon her account to repudiate Dawson's offer of accommodation, than she felt herself called upon to make every exertion in her power to procure from some other quarter the aid he wanted. After much anxious consideration of the subject, she could think of nobody so likely to stand her friend as Mr. Trundle, though she felt that to apply to him (after the little fraud she had formerly committed, during his visit to the parsonage) was something like an attempt to impose upon him a second time. However, she made up

her mind to write to him, not only as her father's friend, but as Lord Bonham's agent and representative; and his prompt and cordial answer, actually enclosing a draft for the sum required, proved beyond a doubt that a man may have his mind stuffed with idle crotchets and his heart at the same time replenished with solid worth.

While the Spensers and Woodward were spending the evening in something like the old way, before misfortune overtook them, Dawson was galloping across the dreary brown mountains, not to his own house, but in the direction of Redcross. He looked, when the shades of night began to gather round him, not unlike the dreary horseman of a Rhenish legend; he looked defeated, yet dangerous; even since morning his visage seemed to have grown darker, and his eye more expressive of evil, as if his mind was beginning to harbour some purpose deeper and blacker than had hitherto entered into his most licentious calculations. And if then you could have turned that corrupted and tu-

multuous mind inside out (as naturalists do with certain zoophytes to examine their internal structure), you would have seen that it was so.

His route, on leaving Bonham Lodge, lay by the Black Castle and the parsonage, across the water ; he passed the perilous ruins at full speed, eyeing them apprehensively over his shoulder, as they glimmered in the twilight, and reared their gaunt towers against the faded sky. The whistling of the evening wind in the ivy seemed to interrogate him as to his past life, and the few rays of light that straggled through the chasms or loop-holes in the walls glared upon him like the stern, pale eyes of justice. He would have shunned the parsonage, had it been possible, for it was only associated in his mind with mortification and repulse ; but to reach the water it was necessary to pass beneath its very windows. Those of the library stood partially open : the servants had been airing the apartment and had lighted a fire there, which faintly illuminated the walls, no longer hidden by

literary treasures. Dawson peered in, but there was nothing left of all that had once made that room so refined and beautiful save two busts, which stood seemingly staring at one another, like Calpe gazing at Alyla. Dawson trembled and raised the window-sash. There was nobody at hand to mark or hear what he did. He stepped into the library, and instantly recognised the pieces of statuary which had formerly done duty in the gallery of his mock ancestors. There was nothing very wrong in an acquaintance of the Spenser family, as he was, raising a window and stepping into an unfurnished apartment; he had seldom been guilty of a less shabby action; yet he felt like a housebreaker at that moment, and the sound of a door opening and shutting at a distance scared him as if in the middle of a burglary. He rushed back to his horse, and hurried to the little quay, but there was no boat there to transport him across the loch. His only resource was a desperate one; but he was in the mood to dare any thing.

He sprang upon his steed, with whip and spur impelled him into the water, and with the utmost possible difficulty gained the further side of the creek in safety. Thence, dripping and jaded, he pursued his way to Redcross, where he passed the night in a low carouse with the Peacocks and the caitiff Thomson. The following morning, at a late hour, he had a private conference with Lucy and Thomson at the inn where he stopped, and almost immediately afterwards started in a chaise for Dublin, *en route* for London.

The conference with the perfidious post-mistress was an important one. Dawson obtained from her an account of proceedings and movements in which he was deeply concerned; he learned that Vivyan had for some time maintained a correspondence not only with Mr. and Mrs. Woodward, but with Mr. Hogg, the sexton, and Maguire, the proctor; that letters had also passed between the curate and Markham, and that several had also been dispatched to Sydney, directed to Quebec. Lucy had actually taken down in writing the substance of some of these letters, and the

dates of all ; and it was evident to Dawson that in one quarter, at least, there was no intention of letting the investigation drop. It enraged him to think that, of all men in the world, it was Elizabeth's accepted lover who was thus secretly hunting him. He had never seen Vivyan but once, at the picnic upon the island, and upon that occasion, (although Vivyan and Miss Spenser were then total strangers,) Dawson had conceived a violent dislike to him, which was subsequently strengthened and inflamed by jealousy, when he discovered that Frank occupied the proud place which he vainly coveted for himself. Dawson paid sharp attention to the dates of the correspondence betrayed to him, and observed that for nearly three weeks there had been no letter received at the Redcross post-office. This looked as if the inquiry had been given up, or intermitted; but there was another conclusion to be drawn from the circumstance, and one which was strongly confirmed by a letter of Markham's, namely, that the course of investigation might have led Vivyan to America. Lucy herself was of

that opinion. It seemed natural that he should have followed Sydney, to consult with him upon the proceedings to be taken; but another and more disagreeable view of the case occurred to Dawson himself, whose conscience poignantly hinted that, if Vivyan had indeed crossed the Atlantic, his motive might be to discover and produce Lamb. It was in Lamb's power completely to establish Sydney's innocence, but unluckily he held the fate of the guilty in his hands as well of the innocent, so that the very idea of his being found and induced to return to Ireland, made Dawson perspire with alarm. Without confiding to his fair friend the extent of his fears, or the true nature of them, he adjured her at parting to watch the correspondence of the Spenser family with redoubled vigilance, and to be particular in apprising him of the import of all American letters. Between fear, jealousy, rancour, and despair, he carried a little private Pandemonium within him on his journey to England.

CHAPTER LVII.

DOWNWARD CAREER OF DAWSON.

“ Who plays the knave, without a knave’s advantage,
Plays the fool also ; ’tis the sharper’s fortune,
Who played with loaded dice and lost the game.”

THE TABLES TURNED.

NOTHING had thriven, for some time back, publicly or privately, with Dawson. It is necessary to trace briefly his recent parliamentary career, in order to explain the precise position in which he stood at the present moment. He had, of late, been growing heartily sick of the life of a legislator, or, to speak more correctly, he was become thoroughly disgusted at having turned his influence hitherto to no good personal account. He procured an appointment for Sharkey ; it was the last Dawson job ; and Sharkey, in

return, urged his generous patron to press his own claims, "make his hay while the sun shone," and demand something from the government commensurate in emolument and dignity to the rank of a member of parliament. Dawson then worried the ministry for himself, as a hundred times before he had worried it for others; he became as formidable as Mr. Fosberry with his liquid guano, or Mr. Trundle with his petition for the thirty millions; he badgered the Home Office, he beleaguered the Treasury, he infested Downing Street, and he laid siege to Dublin Castle. Gladly would the government have promoted and extinguished him; but it was not an easy matter to manage; he was too vain, as well as too grasping, to accept of small offices, and it was impossible to confer any considerable post upon him without damaging the public service to a degree not to be hazarded, either by a conscientious or a prudent administration. At length his necessities became too pressing, and since he could make nothing by his seat in any other way, in a tempest of

rage and disappointment he made up his mind to sell it. Dawson sold the good-will of Rottenham for a thousand pounds, and accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, the only situation in life he ever filled without a blemish upon his character. He parted with his constituents with more hilarity than honesty. They gave him a farewell dinner, and he made them an oration, crammed with honour and virtue, as full as the speech of the expiring fox in the fable. He put his retirement on the grounds of his utter despair of ever achieving any thing for Ireland in the imperial parliament,—he, whose name had never been attached as sponsor to a single bill, who had never even suggested to others a measure of the slightest public utility, who had never done a day's work on any committee of useful inquiry, and who had never requested an interview with a minister, except to propose or promote a job. Nobody at the farewell dinner taunted him with this; for every guest at the table was either his dupe or his accomplice ; the worthy elector who

proposed his health was as arrant a political swindler as the retiring senator himself, and expected to make a nice thing of the new election for the borough. The feast ended with an extraordinary melange of brutality and sentiment, a scene not to be witnessed except in the political conviviality of a place like Rottenham. The banqueters grew tender as they grew tipsy. Their eyes filled as the bottles emptied, and at length it came to falling on each other's necks, and embracing each other frantically. Everybody tried to embrace Dawson, who wept like Niobe, and at three o'clock in the morning by the town clock, overpowered by punch and pathos he rolled on the floor in the arms of his friend Sharkey, while another disconsolate attorney tumbled and rolled over both, vainly endeavouring, in the frenzy of fondness, to clasp Dudley to his breast.

In a few days after this affecting incident Dawson received the sum for which he had bartered his parliamentary position. In a few days more, not a shilling of that sum re-

mained in his pocket; yet it was at that very moment he sought to force his aid upon Mr. Spenser, who had only declined the benefactions of a bankrupt.

No sooner did the rector find a friend in need in Mr. Trundle, than he hastened to acquit himself of his previous obligations. In fact, Dawson received the amount of the bills before they were strictly due; but it was no longer in the power of money to save him. Between his debts and his passions, there was a gulph that would have swallowed up a large fortune; his creditors snatched what they could; the rest was hazarded and lost at the gaming-table, or on the turf, and the characterless *roué* was cut in the morning by the men who had fleeced him the night before.

The day on which he received the amount of the bills from Mr. Spenser was almost the last of his London life. Flushed by the fullness of his purse, and being always social in a dissolute way, he invited Sharkey and some more worthies to a dinner at Blackwall. Dawson had ceased to be an eater; but he

drank the deeper in proportion, and on this occasion outdid all his former Bacchanalian exploits. Before dinner was half over, he had commenced vapouring about conscience and duty, as he always did when the wine began to tell upon his brain. With the claret he began to swagger about his plans as a country gentleman; vowed he would put Castle Dawson in thorough repair; blustered about planting and draining; threw himself back ostentatiously in his seat, flung open his tawdry waistcoat, and deplored the time and talents he had squandered in the House of Commons, which might have been spent so much more profitably living on his estate and improving the country.

“In the buzzom of a happy and continted tinantry,” stammered Sharkey, dropping his head on the table, and instantly dreaming of ejections.

By what road, or by what conveyance, that jovial party got back to town, after that night’s entertainment, was utterly unknown to all of them except Dawson, whom wine

unfortunately inflamed without stupifying ; for it left him in that state of excitement which usually drove him to Crockford's. Thither he repaired, after seeing his company safe in the hands of the watchmen, and dice ended the night, as debauchery counts the hours.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE BURLINGTON.

“ Mischief, thou art swift
To enter in the thoughts of desperate men.”

ROMEO AND JULIET.

IMAGINE yourself now in a bed-room in the Burlington. A bed has just been deserted. The late occupier is flung in a great chair near a table at some distance from the couch. It is Dawson, just risen at two o'clock in the day. His posture and attire is that of the ruined gamester in the “ Rake's Progress.” The table is covered with all the appliances of vulgar foppery, in addition to letters, newspapers, pistols, and soda-water and brandy. The room is filled with parliamentary and rakish rubbish of all sorts. In one corner is a chaos of blue books ; in

another a heap of clothes unpaid for, and bills never to be settled ; in a third, a collection of brass-knockers torn by the senator from hall-doors. Scarce an article in the chamber but tells a tale of profligacy. Wonderful it is how some men live as they do, surrounded night and day with the monuments of their follies and their crimes.

Dawson is a ruined man. He lost last night the entire of the sum repaid him by Mr. Spenser. Even his bill at Lovegrove's will never be discharged. He is utterly ruined, and sits there in the savage gloom of desperation, nobody yet knowing how utterly and hopelessly lost he is, not even the friend of his youth and the attorney of his bosom.

He has just despatched a note to Sharkey, in order to acquaint him with the results of last night's amusement.

"Bob," said Dawson, when his friend arrived, wonderfully fresh after the night's excess, "Bob, I'm done at last."

"I don't feel quite comfortable myself,"

said Sharkey, supposing that Dawson alluded to the effects of last night's dissipation.

"It's not that, Bob ; I'm done brown."

Sharkey laughed.

"It's not brown you are," he said, "but blue, Dud;—you are always blue before breakfast."

Dawson acquainted him with the mishaps of the night.

"I'm cleaned out, Bob, and that's the long and the short of it ; I must run."

"What's come over you this morning?" asked Sharkey, growing a little serious.

Dawson then made the fullest financial statement he had ever made to his man of business in his life, and in ten minutes fully convinced him he was worth several thousand pounds less than nothing.

"It's a bad business, Dud."

"You may say that, Bob."

"And where do you think of running to?"

"I have a brother in Van Diemen's land, and I'm thinking of joining him, scraping together all I can, and speculating desperately in sheep."

"It's a bad business, Dud."

"Bob, I haven't told you half my business with you this morning," said Dawson.

"I hope you have told me the worst half," said the other.

"I'm thinking of going to Castle Dawson for a few days, to wind up affairs there."

"I wouldn't advise you to do any such thing," said the attorney; "people might be looking for you whom you wouldn't like to have at your heels; and besides, what affairs have you to wind up there or anywhere else?"

"Yes, but I have," said Dawson; "and, at all events, wouldn't I like to see the old place once more before I leave it for ever; many a rollicking day we had there, Bob."

"Many a queer thing was done there, Dud."

"Many a queer thing," said Dawson, repeating the attorney's words, whether abstractedly, or with a new meaning, it was hard to say. His looks puzzled Sharkey, and made him ask Dawson what he was thinking of.

“ I was just thinking,” he replied, “ that almost the only queer thing that was never done at Castle Dawson, to my knowledge, was—but no matter; that’s neither here nor there,” he added, suddenly checking himself.

“ No,” said Sharkey ; “ but take my advice, and don’t set your foot in Ireland again, whatever you do ; it would be a risk, Dud.”

“ What care I for risk,” roared Dawson, starting up and striding melodramatically up and down the disordered room, with his gorgeous dressing-gown hanging about him, unshaven, ghastly, and hideous with sudden passion, to a degree that frightened Sharkey, who concluded him delirious between the wine and the losses of the previous night. At length he stopped abruptly opposite to the attorney, and broke out with furious earnestness, although still in the “*Cambyeses’ vein*,” which was second nature with him—“ What care I for risk? I never succeeded in any thing in my life, and I tried every thing ; I played every game—I played for money, I played for office, I played for beauty—I played

boldly, too; I was no dastard—was I, Bob? I ask you, Bob,—was I?”

“No one can say that, Dud, at all events,” said Sharkey, too much alarmed by the frenzied manner of his companion to dispute any point with him.

“No, by heavens, they can’t; I was no coward and I was no churl; I was liberal of my life and my money—I risked all and I won nothing. Nothing did me any good. I set my heart on a girl; you know who I mean, Bob,—was there anything I didn’t do to deserve her? I need not tell you, Bob, all I did for her and her ungrateful family. My money, my talents, my parliamentary influence, my life; I put all at their service.”

“You did, and I always said so,” said Sharkey, heartily wishing himself out of the house.

“Is she a great fortune—is she a Miss Coutts? Is there any thing against me?—I mean, that any one can prove.” The voice altered and fell with this very proper salvo.

The point would have told well on the stage.

"What's between you and me," said Sharkey, "is neither here nor there."

"Am I a Caliban, Bob?" was Dawson's next interrogation.

"You are not that, at all events," replied his friend, probably thinking that Dawson meant a cannibal.

"Well, Bob," continued Dawson, "the upshot of it all is, that by"—(it is unnecessary to quote Dawson's phrases *verbatim*)—"I'm not going to put up with it any longer. I'll right myself, if the world won't right me. Either it's fate or it's witchcraft that's fighting against me, and by ——, I'll try one fall more with the one or the other, before I shoot myself. My plan, Bob, is what I have just told you."

"You told me no plan."

"I told you I was going to Castle Dawson."

"I see no plan in that," said Sharkey.

"It's a resolution, then," said Dawson.

"It's a foolish one," said Sharkey; "and

I don't see what good it will do you with the lady."

"I'll take leave of her at all events," said Dawson.

"You are too sentimental, Dud," said Sharkey, "but if you must go back to Ireland, go by long say, I recommend you."

"You don't suppose I'm such a blockhead as to go any other way, in existing circumstances," said Dawson. "Captain Dowse is in the river with the brig that did the job for me before."

"Well, there's some sense in that," said Sharkey.

"You must come with me, Bob," said Dawson.

Sharkey at first positively declined the invitation, which seemed indeed no very tempting one, falsely alleging that he had a case to attend to in the House of Lords, but Dawson overcame his reluctance, partly by holding out the prospect of a glorious farewell debauch with a few choice fellows like themselves, and the remnant of the wine in the

Castle Dawson cellar, partly by tender reminiscences of their old rascally friendship. Sharkey, in truth, was not much better off in point of fortune or prospects than the ex-senator himself; and when a man lives from hand to mouth, the ties are never very strong that attach him to any particular spot on the earth's surface. The attorney further undertook to go down that very day to Blackwall, and order Captain Dowse to be in readiness to sail within twenty-four hours.

Sharkey was not long gone upon this mission, leaving Dawson ruminating upon some dodge to effect his escape from the Burlington without settling his bill, when a servant entered and brought him letters. One was from Mrs. Peacock. He tore it open. Its effect was like the pouring of oil upon a furnace, or vinegar into a wound. He started on his feet, tore his hair, tugged at his neck-cloth, and ranged the room grinding his teeth and stamping like a maniac. The intelligence more than confirmed his apprehensions as to Vivyan's movements and the object of

them. Two letters, in Vivyan's handwriting, bearing American post-marks, had reached Redcross. The first was addressed to Mrs. Woodward, but it had been sealed in a manner that baffled Lucy's ingenuity, and with all her expertness she was forced to content herself with as much as she could read through the folds of the paper, without violating the wax. This was enough, however, to prove that Vivyan had found Sydney, and that they were both in quest of the fellow whose evidence was of such vital consequence. The second, which arrived with the first, although dated nearly a fortnight later, was more manageable, as the post-mistress expressed it; it was a letter to Elizabeth herself, and, as if Mrs. Peacock desired to drive Dawson frantic, she had copied almost the whole of it for his information. The name of Lamb was not mentioned, perhaps advisedly; but the letter (which seemed to have been written in a delirium of joy) announced in general terms that the means had been discovered not only of triumphantly acquitting

Sydney, but of establishing charges of almost incredible enormity against parties who little dreamed of the exposure that awaited them. The rest of Vivyan's letter was all made up of language, which, though perfectly innocent in its nature, the writer would never have committed to paper, had he dreamed of its meeting any eye but Miss Spenser's. Perhaps this was the part that most infuriated Dawson. Accustomed to indulge in violent bursts of passion, he dashed the furniture about the room, uttered a thousand horrid imprecations, snatched up a pistol and seemed on the point of blowing out his brains, then swallowed brandy, and looked as if about to tumble in a fit of apoplexy. The brandy, however, had a composing effect, and Mrs. Peacock's dispatch only confirmed Dawson's previous intentions. He shaved himself, and looked a degree less rakish and desperate when Sharkey rejoined him close to dinner-time. They dined together, and when the attorney learned, amongst the confidences of the evening, that the return of Lamb to

Europe was a probable event, he heartily concurred in the prudence of his friend's resolution to follow his brother to Van Dieman's Land.

The following evening, Captain Dowse's ill-looking brig, with an ill-looking crew, and several ill-looking passengers, in addition to Dawson and his agent, sailed for the west of Ireland. It was on the deck at midnight, while they were both smoking cigars, and the captain was blaspheming to his men, that Sharkey first learned the real object of the voyage.

BOOK X.

CHAPTER LX.

CAROUSALS.

“ At one time he assembled three or four especial good Hacksters and roaring Boys, and made them drink like *Templars*.”

RABELAIS.

CAROUSAL at Castle-Dawson. Old times come back again ; wine flowing like water ; awful drinking in the ruinous parlour ; furious gaming in the decayed drawing-room ; a select party of insolvents, black-legs, and desperadoes.

It was always a stormy place. The wind never slept there ; nothing reposed within five miles of it ; its atmosphere was the type of modern Irish patriotism, never a calm, or even a steady gale ; nothing but squall and

bluster. Now, as if expressly to suit both the riotous mirth of the guests assembled, and the gloomy habit of the proprietor's mind, the weather was dark as well as gusty; it was cold, too, for it was the fall of the year—a damp insinuating cold which penetrated your bones, and either cramped you with rheumatism, or wrung you with tooth-ache.

It was a house that demanded huge fires, mountains of blankets, and perpetual motion, to keep its inmates warm; and even then it called for, and almost justified, deep drinking to make them forget, as soon as possible, what a dreary place it was at best. Some ruinous houses tell, even in their decay, that they had once been virtuous buildings, that the feet of worthy men had once trodden their halls, and that honest faces had once gathered round their hearths; but Castle-Dawson told no such story. There was something more than bleak about its dilapidation. Its decline was not the decline of respectability; its antiquity was ill-looking; it reminded you of the old age of vice,

which no lip blesses, and to which no knee bends.

Perhaps it was that the blankets were not mountainous enough, but certainly the party did not waste much of their night in bed. Dawson was of course master of the revels ; he was dissolute and uproarious certainly, but he was too haggard and abstracted for a Comus. Still he drank himself, and he cheered the toppers ; many a time, too, did he descend into that mysterious wine-vault of his, which corresponded with the ocean, and bring forth remnants of bins, which had been stocked in the gay but wicked days chronicled by old Sir Jonah.

The dinners were solid and coarse, but the company was not fastidious. They drank generously, and generously overlooked the deficiencies of a bachelor's establishment. The "Repeal of the Union" was drank vociferously every day ; Dawson proposing it in a mad speech, and Sharkey always roaring for "one cheer more."

There was an anachronism in these

festivities. They savoured of the jovial times before the Union, more than of the saturnine age which Pitt and Castlereagh had the honour of introducing. Not only day and night were reversed at Castle Dawson, but even centuries were turned topsyturvy.

But Dawson had not revisited his paternal mansion on this occasion with mere designs of hospitality and mirth, however coarse and licentious.

Within a pistol-shot of the house, which Dawson used swaggeringly to call his ancestral mansion, a brig was swinging at anchor, which Markham's eye would have recognised at a glance as the same respectable craft which he had seen trading so mysteriously in books and pictures on the memorable night of his bivouac on Spenser Island. If you had gone on board the Dolphin (for so the brig was named), you would have seen that active proceedings were in progress to furnish and decorate her small cabin with something more than comfort; there was an

obvious, if not a very successful, effort to fit it up with some degree of luxury and refinement. Nay, more, you would have been struck by observing that the arrangements were of a feminine character; and, in fact, there was a tight, active, bustling, and good-looking young woman on board, not merely superintending, but, with her own smart hands, briskly and cleverly assisting in putting every thing into the neatest possible order.

The bed-rooms of Castle-Dawson had been ransacked for the principal part of the furniture of the cabin, for you may suppose that dressing-tables, sofas, looking-glasses, and such articles, were somewhat scarce on board a ship like the *Dolphin*, when in the best sailing trim. To transfer these things from the house to the brig, the secret communications between the cellars and the clefts or caves along the beach had been found extremely convenient; and the small black skiff employed in the transportation had not yet completed its work, but was still to be seen

darting in and out of the mouth of the cavern, like a boat plying on a subterraneous canal.

It was night-fall, and the red lights thrown by the brig's lanterns upon the two rough faces in the skiff, as well as those which their flambeau, in return, cast upon the people on the deck of the brig, made the scene as picturesque as the transaction was irregular.

The features of the young woman were very imperfectly seen, and she seemed not anxious to display them. Her bonnet was close, and her hair, disordered by the breeze, and occasionally by the spray, streamed about her face and assisted to conceal it. There was nobody, perhaps, whom she cared to favour with a peep at any part of her person, for she was most comfortably and impenetrably wrapt in a scarlet mantle, with a gray plaid shawl or scarf folded over it, and both were not more than the evening required, for it was damp, raw, and blustry, as indeed it generally was at this dismal part of the coast.

Occasionally a gust came from off the shore and brought with it sounds like those of gross merry-making. Dawson's friends, if not Dawson himself, were evidently carousing deeply.

There seemed to be three seamen in the brig at the time ; two of them were minding their business, the third, who seemed to have some command, was overlooking the operations going forward, and occasionally trying to engage the young woman in conversation. But she seemed disinclined to converse with him, and intent upon nothing but the business for which she had come on board. Though the wind evidently annoyed her, blew her bonnet half off her head, and made her grapple her shawl about her, she scarcely spoke at all, but only bit her lip, or uttered some little peevish but inarticulate exclamation.

The boat issued once more from the cavern: the effect then was particularly striking. A ruddy glow strongly illuminated for a moment the low-browed arch under the cliffs,

and the next instant was diffused over the agitated water. The boat came along-side, and this time its cargo was a fractured looking-glass in a tarnished gilt frame of carved wood, a fragile table of some fanciful shape and material, and a couple of old tapestry screens, one of which was much torn, probably by Sydney Spenser's pistol-shooting. The articles were not heavy, and were easily hauled up into the brig.

"Is that the last?" demanded the young female.

One of the boatmen replied in the affirmative.

"Then I'll just see those things put in their places," she said, "and I'll return with you."

In about ten minutes she was ready to leave the brig; the seaman who had been desirous to flirt with her now handed her civilly into the boat; she thanked him curtly, and ordered the men to pull back into the cave. She was evidently a bold girl; for the place she was going to, the fellows she was trusting herself with, and the time of the

day, were sufficient to make most young women a little nervous.

The skiff plunged into the hole in the crags, whose jagged points and splinters sometimes caught the jackets of the boatmen and the dress of the young female, while the wreaths of sea-wrack pendent from the roof of the chasm bobbed against their foreheads, and now and then filled their eyes with brine. The air was cruelly cold, and the light only just enough to show the extremities of objects, the points of the rocks, the tips of the noses, the illuminated edges of the oiled-skin hats.

The young woman was well pleased when she reached the foot of the ladder. Directly the trap-door was opened, down came in gusts the noise of the coarse conviviality in the dining-room ; and the kitchens, with the entire basement story, rang with it, to the exclusion of all other sounds.

In ordinary times you heard nothing in this part of the house but the squall and the surge, and they made sufficient hubbub. But

now the roar of the gaiety drowned the thunder of the waves against the beach, and their dismal groaning under ground. The girl untied, partly raised her bonnet, and listened with attention, as if she wished to distinguish some particular voice among the rest; she then called to one of the wild attendants who were lounging about the passages, and ordered him to conduct and light her to her room. The fellow snatched a blazing brand of bog-pine from the kitchen-hearth, and preceded her through the mouldering corridors.

“Your master is still with his company,” she said, interrogatorily to her torch-bearer, who, uncouth as he was, wore a tarnished suit of the Dawson livery.

The clownish footman, ill at ease in a garb that had not been made for him, shrugged his shoulders, and replied in the affirmative.

The room she repaired to was the same remote and small one to which we may remember that Dawson, upon one occasion,

dismissed two guests of his who were not presentable in decent society. There was no furniture there now, save a few creaking chairs and a crazy table; a sofa which it formerly contained had been sent on board the brig. There was, however, a good turf fire in the hearth, and the lady was not sorry to see it, after her long exposure to the night air. She flung her bonnet on the table, and sat her down before the blaze, her feet close to the embers, her arms folded on her bosom, and her eyes fixed on the flickering flame, with an expression that did not imply the most virtuous train of inward meditation.

She probably slept, for on the door being abruptly flung open, she started up with a slight scream, and then laughed at herself for being frightened. It was only Dawson, just escaped from the dinner-table, at which he had left his friends—perhaps a few of them under it. The room was very dark, but there was light enough for present purposes. Dawson's voice announced the depth of his potations, if not of his designs.

It was thick and stammering, as he said,
“Is all ready, Lucy?”

She replied in the affirmative. He then asked her whether she had had supper and wine; but she was doggedly temperate, and only requested an immediate escort back to Redcross.

“Not to-night, woman,” said Dawson.

But she was peremptory; her work was done, and she must return to her husband. Dawson pressed her, and cracked some thrice-cracked jokes at the expense of conjugal fidelity, as if Lucy had been renowned for fidelity in any relation of life. However, she was constant to her resolution now; and the same kerne who had lighted her with the blazing faggot was now directed to convey her on a swift horse across the hills. Dawson himself helped her on horseback. She mounted behind her wild conductor, and soon disappeared in the mountain mists. Until that night Lucy Peacock had always been a brave girl. If cowardice is a feminine quality, she was now feminine enough. She quivered with every bull-rush which the

wind stirred in the fens; the wings of the moor-fowl, fluttered from their nests by the horse's hoofs, dismayed her. She clung with convulsive tenacity to the waist of her escort, and the little light that there was in the pitchy sky, instead of being a source of comfort and hardihood, only ministered to her terrors, and metamorphosed every gray stone and wandering sheep into an object of alarm.

Dawson spent the residue of the night more soberly than his company. He tore himself from the social circle to hold clandestine conferences with Sharkey and the commander of the respectable craft at anchor under his windows. Captain Dowse was the name of that distinguished officer. He was a short, square, cadaverous, one-eyed villain, who looked as if nature had cut him out for the diabolical trade in men, and as if the horrors of the middle passage would be cakes and ale to him.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE ABDUCTION.

“Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree
Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard
Of dragon watch, with unenchanted eye,
To save her blossoms and defend her fruit
From the rash hand of bold incontinence,
Of night, or loneliness, it recks me not :
I fear the dread events that dog them both,
Lest some ill-greeting touch attempt the person
Of our unowned sister.” COMUS.

It was a Friday evening. In September the days are generally bright in Ireland, but their span is of course much contracted ; the sun departs precipitately for the other hemisphere, and, when there is no moon to “take up the wondrous tale,” the sovereignty of darkness is soon established. Mr. Spenser had gone over to Redcross after breakfast to transact some parochial business, intending to

bring the Woodwards back with him to the lodge ; and Elizabeth (radiant with joy at the happy news from America, which had reached her only the day before), having occupied herself within doors the entire morning, towards the close of the day went out alone, to take a short stroll, not purposing to go very far from the house. Lord Bonham had interspersed the heath that clipped in his wild retreat with little patches of shrubs and flowers, such as the sea air and the mountain soil suffered to thrive ; Miss Spenser, having old gardening habits, was wont to pay occasional attentions to these tiny oases in the desert, and she commonly carried a garden-knife in the pocket of her apron, to assist her in her little horticultural operations. Thus occupied on the day in question, she strayed unconsciously to the edge of the enclosure, and lingered there awhile, smitten by the beauty of the evening, and of the scenery that surrounded her ; the view bounded at some points by glorious glimpses of the sea, at others by the rocky summits of the hills,

which were now attired in the richest autumnal colours. The labourers' bell rang six as she reached the spot we have mentioned, and, as she did not expect her father to return until near seven, she passed the enclosure by an opening in the fence, and planned a short tour, calculated to lead her back to the lodge in about twenty minutes. She had not proceeded far before she encountered a young man, whose countenance impressed her painfully. It was a face familiar to the reader, but to Miss Spenser entirely unknown. The fellow, however, was not physically formidable, even to a woman ; his shoulders were contracted, and his cheeks pale and hollow, so that Elizabeth could not help pitying, while she gladly withdrew her eyes from him. A few moments brought her to the road-side ; and there she was greatly surprised to observe a chaise, with four horses, drawn up in the shadow of some trees which grew there. A charming thought instantly suggested itself, that it might be Vivyan returned. She advanced to speak to the postillion, who was standing near ;

he uttered something unintelligible, and she turned disappointed to resume her walk. In an instant two ruffians, masked and otherwise disguised, sprang on her from behind the fence; there was nobody to hear her shrieks, as they dragged her to the chaise. Terror now almost bereaved her of reason. When she first came to herself, she was alone in the carriage, and the postillion was urging the horses, at the top of their speed, across brown hills unknown to her. Her first thought was to open the door and cast herself upon the heath, which the wheels of the chaise grazed as it swept along. But she heard the clattering of hoofs behind her; she was guarded by outriders; and she opportunely recollected that if she was hurt by the fall, which was so likely to happen, she would only be the more at the mercy of the villains in whose hands she was. Who could they be?—what could this undreamed-of violence mean?—whither were they whirling her across the mountains? The fearful thought quickly flashed upon her that this

could be the atrocity of only one man in the world. As far, too, as she could form a notion of the direction in which she was moving, it was towards Castle Dawson. The agony of her mind under that conviction (for it soon became one) is beyond painting. The dangers before her seemed as great as ever woman was exposed to: she stood in need, at that trying moment, of all the strength of mind, stedfastness of purpose, and energy of will, of which nature had implanted the seeds in her character; and fortunate now it was that her recent experience in life had educated and corroborated those hardy qualities. Yet what was any former trial to that which now awaited her? Now, it was brute force she was the victim of; no passive courage would carry her through the struggle that impended. She was in Dawson's fangs! She was going to the house, at the very name of which she was wont to shudder, as children do at the castles of ogres. The very name was a guarantee for every thing lawless and licentious, and her heart sank within her when she

reflected that the violence which she was now experiencing, was designed but as a mere preliminary to further deeds, which her blood ran cold to think of. Frantically she clasped her hands to her eyes, as if she could thus exclude the images of horror that presented themselves—images of danger to what was dearer than life. One hand fell down upon her lap ; it touched the garden-knife—She was not without a weapon to face a Tarquin ! She opened it ; the blade was short, thick, but keen enough to deal a mortal wound. While she was gazing upon this heaven-sent protector, one of the masked horsemen rode up close to the carriage-window. Instead of returning the knife to the pocket in her apron, she thrust it open into her bosom.

It was now darkening apace. The horseman who rode up seemed to have done so only to quicken the postillions, for the carriage now flew like the wind, the course being down a long declivity, at the base of which the unhappy girl thought she could

just discern the waste of the ocean, with a dim gray object on its margin, which, with unutterable horror, she concluded was the reprobate mansion of her persecutor.

It was black night when the chaise halted before the dilapidated porch. The movements were all so rapid, and the house was so dark, that Elizabeth could scarcely distinguish the objects she passed, while with force, but not with violence, she was hurried through gloomy passages and up dreary staircases, to a chamber on the first floor. Repeatedly and sternly she demanded whither they were bearing her; by what right or pretence of right her liberty was thus violated; and who was it that dared to commit this intolerable outrage? Her questions received no answers; her taunts no notice.

She now found herself a prisoner in a spacious room. It was hung with old and tarnished draperies; it contained a bed, some presses, and other bed-room furniture; there were two windows looking over the wide

dismal yard, where the old hound was still howling and there was a large ruinous fireplace, with some burning peat in it, which afforded all the light in the apartment, save the glimmering of a thin candle on a three-legged table in the midst of the floor.

About a quarter of an hour elapsed before any thing occurred to prove that the house contained any inhabitant but herself; not a sound reached her ear but the whining of the hound, the melancholy dash of the waves, and the intermitted moaning of the blast. It was a dreadful interval. The appearance of her ruffian foes would have been a relief to its mysterious horror. She felt a desperate anxiety to know and to brave the worst—to see her assailants and to cope with them. Could she have unlocked the door, she would have ranged the house, seeking the villains who had dragged her there; she would have gone in quest of the ruffianism that seemed now to be skulking with some infamous design, perhaps biding its own time to pounce upon her when exhausted with

fatigue, and less able to combat force. But the door was securely fastened on the outside; and the windows seemed equally to forbid egress. There are men; it is to be feared, who, in the situation of this fair young woman of two-and-twenty, would have lost some of the composure so important in great dangers. It is high praise of a girl to say that from the beginning to the end of the struggle to which she was now committed, she scarcely neglected any precaution, or failed to try any resource, which there was the slightest use in resorting to under the circumstances. She felt more and more every moment that upon her own resolution, and probably upon her own hand, her deliverance must depend. Inspired by a sacred enthusiasm, she fell upon her knees before the table, and with clasped hands besought the support of the God of purity and innocence to deliver her out of the power of wicked men, whatever shape their guilty purposes might assume. Rising already reinforced by that brief and fervent act of devotion, she recollected her

secret weapon, drew it forth again, sheathed it in the folds of her soft raiment, and felt the spirit and resolution of a Lucretia to use it at her need.

Just as she returned the knife to her bosom, a step was audible—it approached—a hand was upon the key of the door—it grated in the wards—the door opened.—When it closed again she was shut up in the same lone room with the man whose approach to her person, even in her father's house and presence, had often made her shudder. His villany faltered under the eye of the outraged maiden; she faced him with an energetic composure that unnerved and petrified him. He forgot the love-speech he had framed to give the colour of romance to his nefarious conduct, and stammered forth a foolish apology for the unworthiness of the apartment and the badness of the fire.

“Confine yourself to an explanation of your behaviour, Mr. Dawson,” she replied, with indignant scorn. “Why am I here?—why have I been torn from my friends by brutal

force? Why am I thus barbarously insulted and abused?"

"Calm yourself, adorable Miss Spenser," he replied; "calm yourself, and I will explain all; do not tremble so—sit down."

"I do not tremble, sir—though I am in your house, Mr. Dawson, I do not tremble."

"Hear me, charming girl—but you are fatigued—be seated."

"I shall not sit down while I am at Castle-Dawson," she answered bravely. "I demand my freedom; I neither ask nor shall I receive courtesy from you—let me go, and instantly."

She moved towards the door—he placed himself so as to obstruct her approach to it.

"No, Miss Spenser—you do not leave this to-night; you are in my power; it is my turn now to conquer; we shall see whether my passion is not as resistless as your charms."

"Oh, you shall dearly rue this atrocious outrage; you shall answer it dearly both to my family and to the laws of the country."

“Do not talk of your family—I do not wish to speak of them except with respect and affection. The old friend of your brother—”

“His corrupter—his betrayer.”

“I did not betray him, Miss Spenser. This is more of your injustice—your cruel injustice to one whose only crime is to love you.”

“I am not going to argue with you, sir—it is getting late—again I demand my freedom—release me—release me at your peril. Why do you thus cruelly detain me?”

“Do you talk of cruelty,” he replied, now beginning to recollect some of his prepared address, “you, whose cruel insensibility to the truest, noblest, and sublimest passion that ever thrilled a human bosom, has driven me to this last resource of desperate affection. No, not desperate, I will not call it desperate; you see before you a frantic, but not despairing lover. You are one of those women—the grandest of their sex—who are not to be won by the ordinary tokens of sincerity.

When I saved your dear life, adorable girl, did I not well know that it was not by such common-place gallantry a heart like yours was to be gained? No; you were only to be convinced by enormous sacrifices, such as my ambition and my country. I have already sacrificed one by retiring from parliament, and I am on the point of sacrificing the other by leaving Ireland for ever."

"What is all this to me, sir ; what are your intentions to me?" Elizabeth naturally demanded, seeing no drift in this oration, and beginning to apprehend that she was in the power of a lunatic as well as a ruffian.

"That shall be explained to-morrow, or sooner, if the wind changes," said Dawson.

"No, no—I leave this to-night—this instant," she cried vehemently.

"Resistance is vain ; but need I assure you that in this house you shall be safe from harm?"

"Depend upon it I shall, sir," she said, with quivering energy.

While he promised her security he looked dangerous in the extreme ; he still stood between her and the door ; his eye was sometimes rudely fastened upon her ; sometimes it wandered strangely about the room. Again he alluded to her fatigue, and offered to take her hand to conduct her to a seat. With tremulous vigour she repelled the hateful attention, and repeated her declaration, that she would never sit while she remained his prisoner. He uttered some scarce-articulate words, half reproachful, half passionate, and moved to the door. She thought he was about to relieve her from his presence, but he went to the door only to lock or bolt it. The terrified girl raised a scream that pierced through every corner of the dreary house. He advanced towards her with a savage declaration that her cries would call no one to her aid. She repelled him with her extended arms, with the fierce action of beauty and virtue in the face of danger. He approached another step and attempted to catch her waist.

The garden-knife flashed in his face.

He recoiled before the instrument of death and safety.

“Do you depend on that?” he asked between his clenched teeth, with affected contempt for the weapon, and the resistance of a girl.

“Yes, Mr. Dawson,” she cried, “upon this, and upon the support of heaven, is my resolution to defend my honour with it.”

He laughed fearfully, and looked at once dubious and dreadful. The thought now occurred to her, that if she could but drive him from the room and fortify herself there, it would afford time for her father and friends to come to her rescue, as they would not fail to suspect Dawson to be the author of the outrage. Possessed of this thought, she did not content herself with standing on the defensive, but menacingly commanded him to leave her presence.

“Retire instantly, Mr. Dawson,” she cried, almost unsexed by the exigency of her situation, and assuming the post and attitude of

active hostility ; “leave me this moment, or I will compel you with this weapon. If I am a prisoner here to-night, I shall pass it not only in safety, but in solitude. Begone, or I will chase you from me.”

So speaking, she advanced upon him with no feigned determination, but with the actual fierceness of a noble high-passioned woman. As a beaten hound slinks from his chastisement, so did the baffled and degraded Dawson, white with rage and fear, retire before a garden-knife in the lifted hand of a girl.

Directly he was gone, she secured the door, not only with the key and the bolt, but with as much of the furniture as she could accumulate against it with the remains of her exhausted strength. There was no other door to the chamber. She examined the windows. The fall to the ground from one of them was some twenty or thirty feet. Immediately under the other was the roof of a stable ; or some out-office, slanting towards the yard. Her defence on this side was therefore but slight,—only the shutters of the

windows, which she made as fast as the arrangements permitted. There was, then, nothing to be done but to rely upon the providence which had so far protected her, and abide the course of events ; but it was a harrowing situation ; she thought of her very securities with terror ; a few chairs and boxes her only barricade against the extremity of outrage. How weak she felt, too, now that the excitement of instant peril had ceased to give an hysterical vigour to her limbs ! It was impossible to keep the resolution she had announced not to sit during her captivity. She sat for upwards an hour almost motionless, listening intensely to catch any noise that might intimate either the approach of friends, or the return of the enemy ; sometimes she thought she could distinguish voices, but in general the only sounds were those of the winds and waves, to which she would gladly have committed herself to escape from Castle Dawson. The fire was lowering, and the candle was growing short and dim. The room grew more gloomy

and ghastly every minute. She shuddered with cold ; there were blankets and a counterpane on the bed, but she would have thought their touch contamination. It was now, she calculated, about eleven o'clock. She paced the room for a while, then returned to her chair, still listening and marvelling, either at the dismal noises, or the more dismal silence in the intervals between them ; alternately shrinking with dread, and composing herself with calm reflections ; struggling to keep down fearful bodings with cheerful courage ; trying to fathom the mystery of Dawson's designs, to divine what shape his violence would take, should he storm her in her present fortress before the arrival of assistance ; often thinking of her father's despair and misery, on his return from his ride, and trusting that the Woodwards would not hear of her danger until after her deliverance—all the reflections and feelings of a brave and virtuous girl beset with perils, but not discomposed and unnerved by them.

Another hour elapsed, as well as she could mark the passing of time by the agonising train of controlled but not vanquished fears. Though unmolested, she was not unvisited during that interval. A hobbling step in the coridor, followed by a hoarse croaking voice at the door, varied the monotony of her dismal situation. It was the withered crone of the kitchen with the offer of refreshment, and the tender of her delicate services to her master's fair visitor. Had Miss Spenser recognised female accents, she might have appealed for assistance to those female sympathies which are rarely quite extinct in the foulest form of womanhood; but the characteristics of sex were wanting in the voice at least of Mr. Dawson's house-keeper. Elizabeth declined her hospitable attentions, and the same hobbling step retraced the passage until its noise was lost, as well as that of the growl that accompanied it, in the other discords of the place.

Anxious to form a notion of the progress of the night, the thought now occurred to her

to unbar the shutters of one of the windows and observe the heavens. She knew some of the leading constellations, and she thought if she could only see the Great Bear, she might divine the hour with some degree of accuracy. With extreme caution, she removed the fastenings and peered out into the dark. It was a wonderfully calm night for the locality, and as bright as was possible without a moon. The concave blazed with stars, and the aspect of the room being fortunately northward, the remarkable group she wanted was easily distinguished, and its inverted position assured her that it was probably an hour or two past midnight. As still she gazed forth upon the firmament, which had nothing purer beneath it than herself, her eye glanced upon the slanting roof under the window, which seemed to slope downwards to the very pavement of the yard, and the idea of escape suggested itself. The difficulties seemed enormous, but the idea possessed her strongly. To flee from such detestable confinement, to get beyond

the reach of such ruthless villainy, were it to the most savage heath or the wildest cavern along the shore, was so desirable, that the more she thought of the dangers the less formidable they seemed. Her resolution to venture it was taken in a few minutes. The advantage of disguise was obvious, and the completest and most commodious would be the attire of the other sex. One of the wardrobes was unlocked and open. She looked into it, and discovered with surprise and joy, a kind of sailor's dress, a blue jacket, loose trowsers of grey plaid. and a round oil-skin hat, which she instantly recognised as belonging to her brother; in fact it was the suit Sidney had worn on the memorable day on which he rode to Castle Dawson with the proctor, and which he had changed there for a hunting-dress of Dudley's. Elizabeth remembered how sharply she had reproved him for appearing in the flashy green coat, and now the jacket he left behind him in its place was about to save her from worse than death.

She speedily metamorphosed herself into a sailor's boy, retaining as much of her female gear as she could ; gathered up her beautiful hair under the hat, took her gray tartan shawl on her arm, to protect herself from cold, and thus, not forgetting her faithful knife, she proceeded to attempt the descent into the yard. Noiselessly she raised the window, and crept out upon the shed beneath it. Fortunately the inclination was gentle, so that she crept on to the edge without difficulty, but she was then at a height above the ground which far exceeded her estimate, and for a few moments her progress was balked. The yard was very obscure, but at some short distance she fancied she could discover what seemed to be a heap of litter. At all events it did not appear to be stones, or any hard substance, and she thought she could gain it by a leap. She raised herself to her feet, and with a vigorous effort sprang upon the heap, which proved to be straw, and received her with a soft and rustling welcome. The egresses

from the yard commanded her attention in the first instance. There were two, a gateway, which was secured, and a door at one side, which was also locked; but the key was in the hole, so that her escape so far was unimpeded. Her heart now, however, sank within her, when she thought of the wide waste of unknown heaths and hills that stretched between her and her friends. How could she hope to traverse them in safety; nay, to traverse them at all? A horse—had she but a horse—“a kingdom for a horse!” Familiar with the ponies of those mountains it occurred to her that she might find one of them in the stables, and she returned and searched the sheds in the yard with that view. She found two animals of that small, hardy, sagacious species; and what was more, she found a side-saddle, the identical one that had been provided for Mrs. Peacock’s use on a former night. The beast was more courteous to her than man had been, and she succeeded, to her own astonishment, in preparing him for the road. She found a whip,

too, which she seized to her use, and leading the pony out of the yard she mounted him eagerly, and having no choice of roads to distract her, simply turned her back upon Castle Dawson, and fled into the hills.

On rode the dauntless girl over moor and mountain, in the visible darkness, only bent upon leaving the abhorred house, and its more abhorred master, as far as possible in the rear. The pony was a brave sure-footed animal, and seemed to feel that he was bearing distressed beauty from the reach of ruffian aggression. On she rode, not fearless, but with no fear that misbecame or overwhelmed her. The sounds of the heath and of the distant sea occasionally startled, but never bewildered her. Hers' was

“ The virtuous mind that ever goes attended
By a strong-siding champion, conscience,”

and her's was the unwavering assurance

“ That he, the Supreme Good, to whom all things ill
Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,
Would send a glistering guardian, if need were,
To keep her life and honour unassailed.”

On she rode, with unflagging spirit, with unabated speed, with undismayed heart, agitated yet constant, like the fair tree in the storm—how different from the girl who rode over the same moors a night or two before, after having atrociously aided Dawson to accomplish his nefarious purpose. Pursuit was what Elizabeth chiefly dreaded; into worse hands she could not possibly fall than those from which she was a fugitive; but to be pursued and overtaken was a mischance so likely to befall her, that she resolved never to slacken her pace while the horse that carried her did his duty. Often she wondered how it came to pass that her friends had not already tracked her out; sometimes she feared that she had taken a wrong course; sometimes she conjectured, what proved to be the truth, that their pursuit had been diverted into a false scent by one of the stratagems of the gang.

It was not until just before sunrise, that exciting morning, that the distracted rector and curate discovered the artifice that had

been practised upon them, and, tortured by the fear that its success had been fatal to Elizabeth, at length, after hours of vain search, and upon jaded horses, took the route they should have taken at first.

The curate was clothed in terror from head to heel. His passion was so towering that it seemed to add a good cubit to his stature. He looked like the incarnation of a whirlwind; his teeth were clenched, and he was dumb with the intensity of his indignation. The staff which he brandished was out of the category of all ordinary cudgels, for it was literally a young forest-tree, such as painters and poets arm a satyr with, or a Cyclops.

The two clergymen, with Lord Bonham's gamekeeper and two officers of police, were now riding hard towards Castle Dawson, when, on gaining the crown of an eminence, from which miles of road could be seen winding through the moors, like an immense serpent, they discerned a rider approaching them at the top of his speed. The dress of a

sailor was noticed before the features could be distinguished. As the speed on neither side was checked for an instant, the distance diminished rapidly, and Mr. Spenser exclaimed, with amazement,

“ Good God, it is Sydney!”—his daughter looked so like her brother, in the garb which the latter had been accustomed to wear. But the next moment Hercules was supporting his lovely niece in his arms, to save her from falling exhausted from her horse.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE SHIPWRECK.

“ Truth will come to light ; murder cannot be hid long ; a man’s son may, but in the end truth will out.”

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

It was not the great curate’s fault that Dawson effected his escape. The minister of the gospel that day performed the work of a dozen officers of justice. His assault on Castle Dawson bore no faint resemblance to the actual storming of a fortress, except that, to his sore disappointment, no enemy appeared to defend its approaches. No nook or corner of that iniquitous mansion did the besiegers leave unransacked. When they reached the vault which communicated so craftily with the sea, Hercules, in the tem-

pest of his fury, shivered into atoms the few bottles of wine which remained after the late debauchery ; his tremendous weapon made the glass fly and the liquor spout in cataracts round about him, until some of his auxiliaries were literally drenched with claret. But the trap door eluded observation in the din, fortunately for those who escaped by that way on board the brig. For some time it was feared that the whole gang had got off, but at length a dapper little fellow in a white waistcoat, with a physiognomy of the same hue, through the excess of his terror, was detected on an upper shelf of a huge wardrobe, where he had endeavoured to conceal himself behind some bundles of old linen. Hercules, who alone was tall enough to make the discovery, dragged him down by the collar of the coat, and had he recognised him as Dawson's man of the law, he would infallibly have given him as good grounds for an action of assault and battery as ever a plaintiff had. Not knowing Mr. Sharkey, he only delivered him over to the constables,

by whom he was securely handcuffed; but though repeatedly questioned as to his name and calling, he was far too shrewd to confess either. Sharkey was the only prisoner made in the house, notwithstanding several hours' search, during which no probable or improbable place in which a man could conceal himself, and which a bludgeon could demolish or break open, escaped the curate's secular arm. Indeed, like the jealous Ford, he searched even impossible places. They were slow to relinquish the chace while a chance remained of discovering the principal malefactor; but the sun was going rapidly down, and the lurid colouring of the sky, with the surly tone of the blast, and other indications which the curate well understood, admonished him to think of withdrawing his forces, in order to have a reasonable chance of regaining Bonham Lodge that night. As it was, the shattered windows of Castle Dawson were reflecting the last dismal gleams of day, when, thoroughly exhausted with their exertions, they retraced their

steps to Branagan's inn, carrying the captive solicitor with them, who preserved the determined silence of Iago after the consummation and detection of his crimes.

While they tarried at Branagan's to refresh themselves, the wind, which had been turbulent by fits all day, increased to a gale, and the night set in so frightfully, that anxious as Hercules was to travel, it was not to be thought of until there was some abatement of the storm. He passed several hours dismally enough in the same little loft which Mr. Maguire had occupied when he was surprised counting his money; and the curate's supper was very little better than what had been served to the proctor upon the same occasion. However, he was more accustomed to the rough than the smooth of life, and never complained of his hard fare, but after he had supped, stretched himself on the little settle-bed to enjoy a nap, while the wind was doing its best to batter the house down. There he slept until past midnight, but without outsleeping the hurricane, and

he would probably have slept longer, had he not been startled from his slumbers by a cry which had startled many a sleeper in that little inn before, the cry that there was a ship upon the rocks. Hercules was already out of bed, huddling on his clothes in the dark, when Mr. Branagan rushed into his room with a lantern to announce the intelligence, well knowing the curate's reputation for skill and bravery in such emergencies. His renown, indeed, was known to all about him, so that they instinctively ranged themselves under his command and obeyed his directions. Having marshalled his force, and provided himself and them with everything the inn contained likely to be of use in saving lives, he led them forth into the dark and howling tempest, and hastened to the point where the halloos of the peasantry who were already on foot intimated that the disaster had occurred. It was no easy matter so much as to walk in the wind that blew, for it was furious enough to have plucked up the trees by their spurs, had there been any

trees on that bleak shore to be plucked up. The waves roared, too, so that a thousand bulls could not have out-bellowed them. The ship had struck upon a reef of rocks at a point of the shore, about a mile from the inn, and close to Castle Dawson. Hercules had never witnessed a scene so fearful as the shipwreck of that night, inured as he was to scenes of this kind, and with all his familiarity with that terrible coast. A party of the country-people, however, had assembled, and, having now experienced and able directors, they succeeded in saving numerous lives, though many a corpse was flung upon the beach, and the vessel itself, an American brig from Quebec, went, before the spectators' eyes, to a thousand pieces. The naked and the wounded (for few escaped without more or less injury), received all the attention and relief that could be afforded them under the circumstances. Some were carried to the inn, indeed as many as it was possible to accommodate there; the rest were distributed through the huts of the poor fishermen about

the spot, whose dwellings were not more open to the storms than were their hearts to all charitable sympathies with their fellow-creatures in distress.

It was sunrise when Hercules again threw himself down on a long bench before the kitchen fire, to recruit his strength after his prodigious exertions during the night. But scarcely had he closed his eyes before he was roused by the game-keeper, and requested to get up and visit one of the sufferers, who was reported to be on the point of death. The report was brought by a miserable old woman, in whose hut the dying man lay. The curate sprang upon his legs instantly, and huddled on his still dripping garments.

"I can't confess the poor fellow," he said, "but I may be of use to him, nevertheless."

It was no easy matter in the storm to reach the dreary place to which the crone conducted the curate, accompanied by the game-keeper and Mr. Branagan of the inn. The old woman literally crept along the

ground, grasping the tufts of sea-pinks to prevent the wind from whirling her aloft like a truss of straw. She led the way, however, to a small deep hollow close to the shore, surrounded, except towards the west, with an irregular wall of cliffs, and destitute of all vegetation, except a few amphibious plants, and patches of stunted fern. The winds collected and howled there like twelve legions of demons. At high tides, with a western gale, the sea usurped it completely, and left the blasted fern strewn with wreaths of sea-weed and shattered shells. It was an awful place either to die, or live in, but Mr. Woodward was accustomed to such scenes, and to find in them the haunts of men.

They entered the hut. The den of a fox could scarcely have been more unfurnished. A hole in the roof was the chimney, and a hole in the wall was the window. The ocean's spray bounded through both apertures. There was an iron pot, and a straw pallet, no other visible household stuff. Mr.

Woodward approached the straw, which rustled with the writhings of the poor wretch who lay upon it ; otherwise no one could have known that anything living lay there, so dark was the wretched place. Mr. Braganan, by the curate's directions, held a lantern which he carried so that its slender thread of light fell upon the face of the wounded man. It instantly struck Hercules that he had seen that gaunt and truculent face before. The idea agitated him, but he made no remark, not being certain that recognition would be prudent, supposing his impression to be correct. The man was as tall and muscular as himself ; his countenance singularly fierce and forbidding. He had evidently received a dangerous, if not mortal hurt, and answered the questions put to him with an effort that seemed to cause him acute anguish, and in a voice scarcely audible in the hurly-burly of the waves and winds. The humane curate stooped over him ; administered some drops of a cordial he had provided himself with at the inn ;

and, examining the wounds came instantly to the conclusion that the case was past the resources of the ablest surgery. The cordial, however, restored strength, if it did not mitigate pain; the wounded man raised himself on his elbow, and expressed an eager desire to see a clergyman, naturally concluding the curate to be a surgeon, or a doctor.

“I am a clergyman, not a doctor,” said Hercules, “but I am not a priest,” he added, meaning that he was not a catholic priest, and could not therefore administer the rites of the Church of Rome to the dying man.

He tried to reply, but failing in the attempt, made a gesture with his hand, intimating that he wished to be alone with Mr. Woodward.

The game-keeper and Mr. Branagan were very reluctant to leave the shelter, but Hercules (anxious himself for a private conference) insisted on their retiring; directing the former to remain within call, and Branagan to return to the inn and despatch a

messenger for the nearest medical assistance. The old woman had crept into a corner of the hut, where she lay rolled up like a bundle of rags, and nobody saw or knew she was there.

“If I am not mistaken,” said the curate, seating himself on the stool, and holding the lantern in one hand, while with the other he again administered some drops of the cordial; “if I am not mistaken, I have seen you before, my poor fellow.”

The man looked as if he desired to ask where.

“At a place in this county called the Black Castle,” said Hercules.

The man again raised himself for a moment, gazed with intensity on the face of his interrogator, muttered assent to his recognition, and fell back on the rustling straw. Hercules gave him time to rally, and then said, with deep solemnity,

“You have crime upon your conscience.”

Crime, indeed a life of crime, was suggested by the pale ferocity of that counte-

nance upon which Mr. Woodward gazed with the same strong eye with which he had once before encountered it, only that now there was pity in the curate's look, for to the expression of violence and guilt, in the face before him, was now added the awful physiognomy of rapidly approaching death.

"Ay, crime enough," was the answer.

"I will hear any statement you choose to make," said Hercules, "but I must reserve to myself the right to make what use of it I please; on that condition I am prepared to receive anything you have to say."

The voice was faint, hoarse, interrupted with the moans of pain, and often almost inaudible, in which the confession was made. It commanded the attention of Mr. Woodward so profoundly that he scarcely breathed while he listened. Portions of it agitated him extremely and suggested various eager inquiries. At length he said,

"This must be stated in the presence of a third person, and taken down in writing,

otherwise it cannot advance the ends of justice."

To this the dying man mutely but willingly assented, and Hercules stepped out and dispatched the game-keeper for the policemen, not untortured by fear lest the vital functions should be exhausted before their arrival. It was a dreadful interval, and more than once it seemed as if death purposed to destroy the evidence, on the preservation and record of which so much depended. But it was not so ordered by Providence; the police came in time to be of the service required, and by one of them the examination was put in writing, as slowly and intermittingly the story was repeated, or the answers returned to the questions which Mr. Woodward proposed. Life meanwhile was ebbing fast. Few moments remained for the exercise of the curate's good offices as a minister of religious consolation, but he made the most devout and zealous use of them, pouring all the balm he could into the hurt spirit, and devoutly

hoping it was not, like his wounded body, past healing. The final struggle soon came and was soon over. When Hercules left the hut, the Atlantic foam was washing the pale grim features of the dead.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE HOUSE-TOP.

“ For ’tis the mind that makes the body rich,
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So honour peereth in the meanest habit.”

TAMING OF THE SHREW.

THUS providentially was the curate the means of preserving from destruction the evidence on which the vindication of his nephew and the happiness of his family depended, for it has already been divined that the man who perished that night in the fisherman's hut was the accomplice of Thomson in the robbery of Mr. Spenser's proctor. It was owing to accident that Vivyan and Sydney had not made the voyage home in the same fated vessel. They had, in fact, secured their berths in it, when the captain

of a British sloop of war, a friend of Vivyan, who was about to sail for England a day or two later, offered a passage to him and his friend, which was too agreeable a proposition not to be gladly accepted, and by accepting it they probably saved their lives. When Hercules first discovered who the dying man was, his alarm had been extreme, lest the two young men should prove to have been also amongst the passengers, and numbered with those who perished. Lamb, however, satisfied him on that point before he became speechless; but his strength failed before he could relate the circumstances under which he had been discovered, and the motives which had induced him to return to Ireland.

The curate's curiosity, however, was not destined to remain long unsatisfied, for the sloop of war had outsailed the merchantman, and was actually at that moment in the harbour of Plymouth.

Hercules hastened back from the scene of death to Mr. Branagan's inn, the storm still

pelting him furiously. In defiance of all obstacles, he then mounted his pony, and, followed by the game-keeper, rode back to Bonham Lodge at the swiftest pace to which, without inhumanity, he could urge Sligo. Never was an arrival more anxiously looked for. Carry had passed the night in a fever of apprehension for his safety, and now he rushed into her arms, not merely to assure her that he was alive and well, but to give her the happiest tidings of which he could possibly have been the bearer. Doctor Wilkins was in attendance upon Elizabeth, who did not recover the horrors of the night at Castle Dawson as speedily as she had done the plunge in the ocean on a former occasion. Her physical exertions, as well as her mental tortures, had been inconceivable. She continued so ill for some days that it was not thought prudent to add to her excitement even by the communication of the most joyful news. Her aunt attended her day and night with the solicitude of a dozen mothers; indeed,

Carry suffered by sympathy quite as much as if she had been the victim of the abduction herself; an exploit which in her case would have been one of the hardest. As to the curate, there seemed no rest for him. He had scarcely drawn his breath at the lodge before the thought of his old tumble-down house; the damage it was likely to have sustained in the tempest, and the hazard to which his children had been exposed, made him excessively uneasy, and he ordered one of the plough-horses to be saddled to convey him to Redcross, for the pony was quite done up. So great was his anxiety, particularly about a stack of chimneys immediately over the room where Billy Pitt slept, that he totally forgot he had made no breakfast, and his wife and the rector were too much engrossed to think of matters of that kind; but Lord Bonham's housekeeper had a great reverence and affection for Hercules, who had once brought her son through a fever, and she now proved her gratitude by bringing him a great bowl of tea and some

proportionate huge slices of brown bread and butter, which he took sitting on the back of the plough-horse, who was by no means impatient for the road. The reader is aware that to reach the town he had to pass close by the parsonage, for it was the same route which Dawson had taken not very long before. When Hercules arrived at that point of his journey, he found certain things going on for which he was utterly at a loss to account. A small trading vessel lay at anchor, just where the smart Gipsy used to be moored in the prosperous days past, and she seemed to have just discharged herself of her cargo, for several boxes and bales of goods, covered with mats and tarpaulins, stood on the strand, while the crew and some of the rector's people were busy transporting other bales, seemingly of the same description, and depositing them in the house. Very little inspection showed that the goods consisted principally of household furniture; but Hercules got very little satisfaction from the people at work, when he inquired by whose orders they were thus

employed, for he very well knew that the rector had no idea of what was going forward. Entering the house, the first person he met was the little proctor, who threw quite as small light on the matter as anybody else, although the curate could not but suspect, from the mysterious twinkle of his shrewd little pair of eyes, that he knew something more than he chose to admit.

Randy almost wept for joy, when he learned what had taken place at Castle Dawson, and how Providence had brought the guilt home at last to the real criminals. He said he knew all along that the truth would come out sooner or later, though he never expected to be spared to see the day, closing the speech with his queer little twittering cough.

"But," said Randy, "there's a bit of a question I wisht your reverince had axed the poor sinner, before his sowl passed, for it's too late to talk of it now."

Hercules desired to know to what he alluded.

"How he knowed," said Randy, "that I

kept the money in the pocket in the left buz-zom of my coat."

"Why, man, he saw you thrust your pocket-book into it the night he paid you the visit at Branagan's."

"The Lord be praised!" ejaculated the proctor, "I always said that was the villian that done it. And did he tell your reverince all about it, and how he terrified the seven sinses out of my poor ould self? Och—ony—oh, it's myself that will never forget the looks of him when he seed the bank notes."

"He did, Randy," said Hercules, fixing his eye severely on the little officer of the Church, "he did, and he told me also what it was that took him down to the inn that night, and afforded him the opportunity of making acquaintance with you and your bank-notes. Randy, Randy, you incorrigible old gambler, it was that old pack of cards of yours brought this pack of troubles upon us all."

"Thin in some sense it was, sartinly, and I won't gainsay it," said the little proctor, greatly abashed, and coughing very pitifully.

"You never said a word about the cards ; not a word about the cards, Randy, did you ever mention."

"I thought it would only aggravate your reverince to hear talk of them," said Maguire, "and I never liked displasing you, Mr. Woodward, honey, for you were always kind to me and mine, and always gave good advice."

"Some of it very unprofitably bestowed, Maguire," said the curate, moving away ; "but enough of the subject, for the present. I see there is some goodnatured scheme on foot to give your old master an agreeable surprise ; however, I won't ask you to let me into the secret."

"I'm mighty thankful to your reverince," said Randy, almost touching the ground with the tip of his nose, "and may providence pour his blessings on you and your good lady and all your beautiful darlings, and may you live to have many more of them."

The curate shook his head very doubtfully at the latter part of this benediction, and

pursued his way across the water, after which a short time brought him to Red-cross. He found his little Woodwards all safe and sound, but his mansion had suffered woeful detriment. The hurricane had smashed numerous panes of glass, which Peter was trying to repair with wisps of hay and as many old hats of his master as he could find ; but the roof had been still more unfortunate ; the court-yard was literally strewn with slates and fragments of tiles, and Billy Pitt and his brother were swimming their paper boats in the pools of water which had found its way into the upper story. Meditating how to remedy all this ravage of the elements with his own honest hands, Hercules walked down to the post-office for letters. Mrs. Peacock did not appear ; her husband was on duty in person, and after considerable shuffling and going backwards and forwards between the office and an inner room, he handed the curate a letter, the seal of which he instantly perceived had been tampered with. It was a

short note from Vivyan, announcing his arrival in England, and there was an allusion in it to a letter which Sydney had written to his father by the same post.

"Any letters for Mr. Spenser?" said the curate.

"None, to-day, sir."

"Be so good as to try, Mr. Peacock."

The post-master was very confident, but turned over his packets, and persisted in his answer. The curate then stated the good reason he had to believe that there was a letter for the rector, and peremptorily commanded a further search. Peacock was visibly fluttered, and again repaired to the inner room. The curate's eye followed him, and directly the door opened he spied two persons in the background; one was Lucy and the other was Thomson. Hercules said not a word. Peacock returned in a few moments with the letter in his hand. The seal, however, showed no sign of having been outraged like the other. Hercules paid the postage, put the letter in his pocket, and

then, coolly walking into the office, accosted Peacock, in a deep stern voice, and ordered him to go back into his privy chamber and inform Mr. Thomson that the Reverend Mr. Woodward desired to talk with him. Peacock turned white as a shroud, and trembled from head to foot as he obeyed the mandate. The moment the curate's message was delivered, the fellow who was the object of it rushed at the door, and made a desperate effort to escape into the street. But Hercules sprang after him, seized him by the nape of the neck, and actually lifted him for an instant off his legs, as if he had been a hare or a rabbit. Peacock shrank cowering into a dark corner, not daring to interpose between the curate and his prey. Lucy remained paralysed with terror in the inner room, expecting to see her hollow-checked accomplice torn to pieces, or cudgelled to death before her eyes. But Hercules had too strong a sense of dignity to use any more violence than was absolutely necessary. Without addressing a word either to the

postmaster or his wife, he strode out of the office, holding a terrible gripe of his captive, and trailing him along the principal street, just as Ellen Hogg, the schoolmistress, might have done with one of her scholars, who had vainly attempted to escape from her hand. A bare-headed and bare-legged mob was soon collected, and upon this occasion assuredly the sympathies of an Irish rabble were enlisted on the side of justice, for they cheered Hercules vociferously and lustily hooted his prisoner, probably judging from his aspect that he was more likely to be guilty of some petty larceny than any crime of dignity, such as an abduction or a homicide. Arrived at the police barrack, the curate found the Castle Dawson party just returned with Mr. Sharkey in custody, and Thomson and the attorney were locked up together for the night. It was not a very discreet arrangement, as the result soon proved.

By the time this adventure was ended, it was drawing towards dusk, and Hercules went home to his children, followed all the

way with the applauses and benisons of his parishioners of all persuasions, every second blessing including a prayer for the fertility of Mrs. Woodward, and a rapid multiplication of the poor man's offspring. He found his progeny (numerous enough in all conscience), hungrily expecting his return; and a glorious Irish stew (a savoury compound of mutton, potatoes, onions, pepper, and gravy) soon smoked on the table in the study, round which they all pressed; the father looking like an affectionate giant entertaining a party of delighted dwarfs, and the corpulent cat going round and round the company, fawning on great and small, and purring parasitically, as loud as he could, to earn his share of the national dish. But the table-talk that day was far the best part of the entertainment. The curate had scarcely time to appease his appetite, whetted as it was by an unusually long fast, so eager were the little folks to hear all about their fair cousin's escape, and so proud were they of their father's prowess. He had only told his

tale some three or four times over, when an uproar reached their ears from the main street of the town, and Hercules sprang up and rushed out to ascertain the cause of the hubbub. Thomson and Sharkey had made their escape out of the window of the room they had been confined in. It was owing to the gross negligence of the police, and Hercules was justly incensed at their conduct. He consoled himself, however, by reflecting that the attorney might have proved a troublesome customer, and that the conviction of the other miscreant was comparatively immaterial, after the dying confession of Lamb. Neither Thomson, nor Sharkey, was ever retaken, or any tidings heard of one or the other from that day to this.

The curate retired to rest not very early that night, for the town continued long in a ferment, yet he was up with the first lark to resume the duties of his hard but happy life. Billy Pitt was an early bird also, and the morning being as bright a one as ever cheered the world, the curate and his son held a consul-

tation whether they should set about repairing the roof, or mount their hacks and visit mamma and cousin Elizabeth at the lodge. Billy was for the latter plan, and Hercules was very well inclined to it also; but the former was more prudent, and the curate was careful never to set his children an example of postponing duty and business to pleasure in any shape. So Peter was despatched to the lodge to bring an account of Miss Spenser's health, and immediately after breakfast, and as soon as the curate had paid one or two pastoral visits to sick people in town, the slating commenced with vigour. Upon this occasion it was not by a ladder that Hercules got on his roof, but out of the windows of the observatory, which was a much safer way, and one that Carry always urged strenuously. The curate exchanged his coat for a flannel jacket, which he kept for his mechanical operations, and borrowed a coarse linen apron of Peter, for his worst clerical suit was too good to have spoiled with lime and mortar. The mortar

was made in the garden, and Billy Pitt carried it up the stairs in a coal-skuttle, having previously collected the slates in the yard and conveyed them to the observatory also. Then the work went on actively; Billy remarking every five minutes that no regular slater could do it much better, and Hercules himself very well pleased with his performance, and now and then, in the midst of his stories of Scipio and Epaminondas (for he and Billy were very classical at such times); stopping and surveying it not without considerable vain-glory. The sun grew very strong, but still they laboured until noon, when the curate said he would set only half-a-dozen slates more, and then they would take an hour's repose and have luncheon. Scarcely had he spoken the words, when the bell attached to the outer gate rang, and the other children, who were diverting themselves about the court, ran to open it. Hercules paid no attention until he heard his name pronounced, and the sound of horses' feet in the yard below. Then he peered

over the parapet and saw that a gentleman on horseback, accompanied by a servant, had arrived at the house-door. The gentleman's figure was too much fore-shortened to be distinguishable; all Hercules could see was that he was attired in black, so he concluded it was Mr. Oliver, or some other clergyman of the neighbourhood, and sent down Billy Pitt to ascertain. But before Billy got half way to the hall he was met by his little brother Hercules, running up in violent excitement, screaming—

“Father, father!! A bishop, a bishop! Put on you, put on you!”

The curate heard the scream of the juvenile from the roof, and, not believing his ears, put his head in at the window to catch the sounds again, when the door burst open and little Hercules rushed in, vociferating—“A bishop, a bishop!” It was as true as holy writ. A bishop was below,—an actual live bishop,—and had asked to see the Rev. Mr. Woodward.

“What did you say?” said the curate, extremely dismayed for a moment or two,

and thinking ruefully that he had left his coat in the study.

"I said you were slating in the observatory, father," said the little Hercules, who had been brought up by both his parents in the ways of truth and simplicity.

While the child spoke, the solemn tread of clerical boots was heard outside, and the grave voice of the eminent visitor in conversation with Billy Pitt; the door opened, and instantly the curate in his working costume, with his narrow trowel in his hand, stood in the presence of the same excellent bishop, to whom he had been introduced at the marriage of Mrs. Dabzac. His lordship, both amused and puzzled at the reply of little Hercules, had desired Billy Pitt to conduct him up stairs, determined, (at the risk of intruding too far behind the domestic scenes,) to witness with his own eyes what promised to be a striking picture of poverty dignified by worth. Such a picture indeed was now presented to his view, and there was nothing in the bearing of Hercules to detract from its full effect. It

was profoundly respectful without an approach to cringing; as Shakspeare says of the elephant, "his legs were for necessity, not for flexure;" and he was too much of a practical philosopher, and far too much of a true Christian clergyman, to be ashamed of his narrow circumstances or of the quaint occupation at which he was surprised. He stood in presence, indeed, of a man who would have despised him had it been otherwise; a prelate, whom riches had not corrupted, nor temporal elevation lowered; who represented in his person the glory of well-used wealth, as the curate did the dignity of nobly-supported poverty. But these considerations were perhaps too abstract for a boy of Billy Pitt's age, for while his father was entering into conversation with the bishop, Billy kept hovering round him, trying to untie and remove the white apron, probably being the more shocked at its impropriety by contrasting it with his lordship's black one. The two good churchmen noticed the boy's proceeding almost simultaneously, and were

equally diverted by it. Still Hercules could not conjecture to what he owed the honour of a visit so unexpected, and his right-reverend visitor seemed equally at a loss to state the business which he really had in hand. His lordship looked out of the windows, and remarked the immense extent of view from them, the magnificence of the ocean, and the fine colouring of a small group of rocky islets in the offing. Then he made some observations on slates and slate quarries, and gave the curate a word of advice on the dangers of his employment and the perfidious nature of ladders; but still it was evident from his manner that it was not to speak of ladders, or quarries, or coast scenery, that he had pushed himself to the top of the house.

He was a shy, reserved, though well-bred man, and it was not always those acts which he performed with most pleasure which he performed with the greatest ease. At length, after briefly alluding to his first meeting with Mr. Woodward in Dublin, and expressing

his regret that he did not see more of a clergyman of whom he heard so much, he came bluntly to the point, and said, there was a preferment vacant in his diocese, more valuable for its rank than its income, and "I am come, Mr. Woodward," added his lordship, "to request your acceptance of it, because I know no worthier man to offer it to, and I am anxious to have you in my diocese."

The bishop hurried away so fast that he actually mounted his horse before he thought of informing Hercules what the preferment was, or gave him time to express his surprise and gratitude in a connected sentence. The curate, by that unexpected visit, was made an archdeacon; there was a small living attached to the dignity worth about three hundred a year, but there was a good house on the glebe; and the best of all was that it was at no very great distance from Redcross parsonage, which would have been a serious drawback.

The news reached Bonham Lodge in a few hours. The post-boy happened to be just starting, and Hercules wrote a line to

Carry. Then he went to his luncheon with Billy, after which he returned to the roof and finished his repairs in silence, thanking God in his heart for having increased his means of educating his children, but otherwise not expecting to be a happier man for his preferment.

Had the Prime Minister written to Mr. Spenser and offered him Canterbury, he could not have made him happier than he was made by the promotion of his curate. Indeed, that promotion made a great many good people happy; and if it be true, as most true it is, though a poet said it, that there is "care in heaven," and "love in heavenly natures to us creatures base," it is scarcely a fiction to say that the advancement of Hercules made the angels themselves glad. As to Carry Woodward, she rejoiced serenely in the turn of her husband's fortunes, and longed to have the whole history of it from his own lips.

But the first members of the family who hailed him by the title of archdeacon were Sydney and Vivyan, who arrived late that

evening at Redcross. The arrival, though not expected, was no very great surprise. The meeting of the nephew and uncle was at once affectionate and solemn. The curate was reluctant to acquaint Vivyan with the sufferings and outrage to which his Elizabeth had been exposed, but it was necessary to do so, and it was no easy matter to restrain him, or Sydney either, from pushing on to Bonham Lodge at midnight. Peter, however, returned with capital news of Miss Spenser, and a note from Carry, in which she said that Doctor Wilkins had pronounced her niece able now to bear any amount of good news, and hoped that, to-morrow or next day, she would be equal to any amount of agreeable company. There was no allusion to the promotion in the note, for the post had not arrived at the lodge when Peter left to return to Redcross. Vivyan and Sydney slept that night at the inn, and ere the following morning was past its prime, the whole party, on good mountain hacks all of them, were trotting over the hills to the

hunting-lodge, Vivyan and Sydney beguiling the road with the narrative of their meeting at Quebec, and the adventures they both had met with in pursuit of the wretched Lamb. Hercules was astonished at the energy displayed by Vivyan, until he thought of the motives and passions under the sway of which he acted, and remembered that love, which makes hard natures soft as wax, has the opposite effect of rendering soft ones hard as iron. From the day that Vivyan parted in tears and misery from Miss Spenser, in her uncle's house at Redcross, he became an altered man, altered in character and constitution; the extreme gentleness of the former and the almost fragility of the latter disappeared; the necessity for great efforts seemed to produce not only the mental vigour but the physical hardihood to make them; he renounced all that bordered on the woman in his delicate and refined nature, and started on his almost quixotic enterprise as manly and brave a fellow as George Markham, or even Hercules himself. Markham would

have accompanied his relative upon an expedition so germane to his taste for travel and exploit, but he was prevented from leaving England at the time by the death of his father, and the domestic affairs in which that event involved him. He beheld the revolution in his cousin with agreeable surprise, hardly recognising the same young man who a short time before had almost fainted under the load of a fowling-piece, and who was quite broken down by a walk of five miles in the Tyrconnell mountains.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE RESTORATION.

“ On to the temple ! There all solemn rites
Performed, a general feast shall be proclaimed.
Sorrows are changed to bride-songs. So they thrive
Whom fate, in spite of storms, has kept alive.”

THE LOVER'S MELANCHOLY.

No disparagement to physic and physicians, one cannot help thinking that there is great healing virtue in a happy turn of fortune, and something extremely tonic and cordial in the spirit of love and friendship. Doctor Wilkins was a very skilful as well as a very amusing man, and no doubt he acted discreetly in keeping Miss Spenser very quiet for a few days after the terrible trial to which she had been exposed ; but she certainly recovered with marvellous

rapidity from the moment she saw her brother returned reformed and saved, and her lover again at her side, in the character of Sydney's reformer and deliverer. Then she had also her uncle's prosperity to exult in, and it was almost enough in itself to restore elasticity to her ankle and bring the carmine of health back to her cheek.

There was no end of rejoicing in the curate's promotion, no end of practising to call him archdeacon, discussing whether he ought to assume the shovel or not, and making him repeat the story of the bishop's visit. Carry almost died laughing at the part borne by her little son in the transaction, and did nothing for whole evenings but repeat—

“A bishop, a bishop—put on you, put on you:—my poor little Hercules—a bishop, a bishop.”

The story is told to this day round the firesides of the family in all its branches, Spensers, Vivyans, and Woodwardes, and causes almost as much mirth as it did when

the event was fresh. The newspapers in a few days announced Mr. Woodward's advancement in the article of ecclesiastical intelligence, and letter came upon letter to congratulate him from his old college cronies, Tom Beamish and others, from many of his wife's friends and relatives, and a few short but warm lines from the Hon. Tom Flinch, who never forgot him. But the warmest of all, at least in terms, though a little prolix, as usual, was the letter that arrived from Mrs. Dabzac. However, it had the rare merit of being perfectly sincere. No member of his family saw the poor homely curate exalted into a titled dignitary of the Church with greater content, and (as Carry remarked) it would have made Arabella still happier to have seen her uncle a bishop. It was not the least of the curious circumstances connected with the curate's fortune that he was partly indebted for it to his niece's vulgar vanity on the occasion of her wedding, and partly to his own magnanimity in overlooking her pettiness.

“Well,” said the rector, “Elizabeth will have an archdeacon at least to marry her : that won’t be so very bad, after all.”

But the rector had to provide himself with a new curate, and that was a grief and trouble to him, for such another man as Hercules was not to be found on every coast, or met on every mountain. The choice of his successor was wisely left to the archdeacon himself, who wrote on the subject to Tom Beamish, upon whose fervent recommendation a fresh-coloured, simple-minded, and able-bodied young man was appointed to the curacy of Redcross, and inducted by the rector himself into the humble abode where his brother-in-law had dwelt so long in happy and honoured indigence. Upon that occasion Mr. Spenser made a happy application of Evander’s speech to the Trojan hero, in the 8th book of the *Æneid*; for, laying his hand gently and impressively on the arm of the young clergyman, as they stood at the door of the old white house, in his

solemn melodious voice he pronounced the lines—

“ Hæc limina victor

Alcides subiit ; hæc illum regia cepit.

Aude hospes contemnere opes, et te quoque dignum

Finge Deo.”

The last clerical duty Mr. Woodward performed in the parish of Redcross was the marriage of his niece; but this did not take place during the sojourn at Bonham Lodge. One serene and sunny morning, when Miss Spenser's recovery was complete, an excursion to the parsonage was proposed by somebody, and though the rector would more willingly have gone anywhere else, he made no opposition, when he saw that the plan was popular. There was a phaeton, a jaunting-car, and ponies for the equestrians. The party set out, and some members of it certainly were astonished beyond measure to find the old house in complete order, furnished from bottom to top with its pristine taste and luxury. Mr. Woodward, we have seen, had some inkling of the matter, but to

his brother-in-law it seemed the work of magic. The glee of the old proctor, as he beheld Mr. Spenser's amazement at the unexpected preparation to receive him, was the best comedy; but Randy had kept the secret so long that there was no keeping it any longer, so it was soon known that Vivyan was the sorcerer at whose command the upholsterer and cabinet-maker had made all comfortable again. But it was not until the rector entered the room which had contained his library, sadly thinking how it had once been peopled, and never expecting to see so much as the backs of his troops of silent old friends again, that his astonishment was complete. Here indeed a necromancer seemed really to have been at work, for his books were all there, marshalled by their nations and languages to receive him, in their ancient cases of curiously carved oak, folios, quartos, octavos, and duodecimos, according to their several dignities, and critically in their own arrangement, looking in fact as if they had never been molested or sent roving about the world.

It was natural that this also should be attributed to Vivyan, and it was in vain he protested that he was as much surprised as the rector himself; but such was the fact; and only for Carry Woodward, who was in this part of the secret beyond all doubt, the restorer of the library might have remained a good while unknown. The truth was that almost every body connected by relationship or friendship with Mr. Spenser, had been anxious to replace him in his former ease and comfort, with the shabby and unnatural exception of Mrs. Dabzac. Mr. Oliver, amongst others, had never enjoyed a day's happiness, since misfortune fell on the man whom he loved and admired. Being a literary man himself, he entered more keenly than any one else into the rector's sorrow when his very books were reft from him; but being unable himself to redeem them, he could only indulge his feelings in complaints and lamentations to his friends and correspondents, which he did so bitterly and incessantly, that at length Lord Bonham heard of the circum-

stances at Rome, where he was, and instantly wrote home to Mr. Trundle to purchase the library at a liberal valuation and thus secure it from irretrievable dispersion. Mr. Trundle, friendly himself to the rector, and zealously devoted to his daughter ever since the day that she gave up a whole morning to his loan-fund schemes, performed his part of the business with the utmost zeal and efficiency. The library was bought, the cases as well as the books, and by Lord Bonham's directions consigned to the care of the enraptured Mr. Oliver, who valued it beyond the Bodleian for his friend's sake, and would willingly have taken ten times as much trouble as it actually gave him to put it up and arrange it in its original order. The only member of the family he communicated with, while thus employed, was Mrs. Woodward, for it was necessary to have some confidant in order to gain access to the parsonage, and be secure from interruption and discovery while engaged in this clandestine labour of love.

Well, if friends did all that friends could

do to make the return of the Spensers to their picturesque home as happy as possible, they, upon their part, made a great many people happy also. The reoccupation of the parsonage made many an eye bright and gladdened many a heart. There were fêtes given, addresses presented, and bonfires kindled on many a hill to celebrate the event. The first person to visit the rector was Father Magrath, the second was the Presbyterian minister, the third was the excellent Doctor Wilkins, with his face that disposed you to weep and his conversation that made you expire of laughing. Last came Mr. Oliver, more than ever shy and monosyllabic ; nay looking as if he had actually given some particularly heinous offence to the family, and was greatly ashamed to present himself before them.

But no one was welcomed back so cordially and enthusiastically as the fair and good Elizabeth. No prince would have been thought too good a husband for her. She had always been not only so humane to the poor,

but so actively useful to them, so beneficent as well as so benevolent, so considerate for the old, so tender to the young, so kind and so patient with every body. So popular, indeed, was Miss Spenser, that had she been possessed with a proselytizing spirit, she would have been an actual little wolf in the Catholic and Presbyterian folds. In the midst of all the preparations for the wedding, and all the tumult of her new but still incomplete happiness, she resumed her attention to the children of the neighbourhood, and reopened her school, which was indeed a model one. Again the robins hopped on the slates at play-hours, and again the fat rosy child of the laundress came in for the cowslips and kisses, as it rolled and rollicked on the little green paddock. Again the yard echoed the multitudinous lisp and murmur of infant education, and the lusty matron at her tub hard by used to rest a moment from her sultry labours, with her bare stout arms in the suds, and try to distinguish the hum of her own brats in the Babel of tiny sounds.

One personage and one only regarded with an evil eye the happy revolution in the fortunes of the Spensers, and particularly the triumphs of Elizabeth's love and of Sydney's reputation. The rage of the malignant post-mistress knew no bounds; but her career in that capacity was cut short abruptly, for Hercules, who never gave a malefactor a moment's rest in his own parish, or indeed anywhere within the reach of his influence, had no sooner leisure to attend to the matter than he forwarded to head-quarters a charge against the Peacocks of tampering with the letters of his family, called for an official inquiry, fully established his case, and succeeded in chasing the wicked Lucy and her husband with ignominy out of Redcross. Nothing was heard of them for a long time, until one day that Mr. Spenser observed in the *Times* newspaper the advertisement of a Mrs. Edward Peacock, who announced her desire to receive a certain number of young gentlemen into her house, promising to instruct them in the rudiments of Latin, to pay

them more than motherly attention, and above all things to train them rigidly in the ways of truth and virtue. The bold hand of Lucy was not to be mistaken, although she neither referred to the Spensers or Woodwards for testimonials of her qualifications.

There was no reason for deferring the marriage, and it was not deferred longer than was necessary to give time for the arrival of George Markham, and worthy little Mr. Trundle. It was a fine spectacle to see how Markham and the Archdeacon embraced, and how the former triumphed in the honour and reward of the man whom he venerated most of all the men he had ever met with, for his heroic combination of physical energy with plain sterling moral worth. The Dabzacs were present, of course; but despite of their frost and formality, the nuptial ceremony was performed with the devout hilarity that becomes it, and all the festivities before and after were as gay and hearty as ever ushered a bride and bridegroom into the holy and hazardous state of marriage.

"And so that extraordinary Miss Spenser is married at last," said Lady Brabble to old Mrs. Loquax, at a ball which Mrs. Pepper gave in Dublin some short time after the wedding.

"To Mr. Trundle, of course," said old Mrs. Loquax.

"To Lord Bonham, I suppose," said Mrs. Pepper.

"Oh, no; not quite so good a match as that; to a Mr. Vivyan," said Lady Brabble.

"I am sure I am very glad she is married to somebody," said the sour and sanctified Miss Vallancy; "it was exceedingly unpleasant to hear a girl so very much talked about."

"She had beaux enough to her string, at all events," said Mrs. Pepper. "In my opinion, she treated poor Lord Bonham excessively ill."

"I'm told," said Mrs. Loquax, "that the dress she wore at her wedding was actually a present from his lordship."

"That's nothing," said another. "Lord

Bonham gave her a superb suit of diamonds, which she never returned. I know it from Carcanet, the jeweller."

"Does any body know any thing about that Mr. Vivyan?" asked one of the clique.

"Oh, nobody," said Lady Brabble, laying down the law.

Tom Flinch came up at the moment, and as he was a know-every-body-that's-knowable sort of man, Mrs. Loquax pounced on him and inquired if he knew any thing about the Mr. Vivyan who had married Miss Spenser.

"Dab's sister," drawled the Honourable Tom. "Oh, he is Sir Thomas Vivyan's brother; he got a large property some time since by the death of a rich relation in Spain."

"That explains Miss Spenser's conduct most satisfactorily," said the heavenly Miss Vallancy; "how shocking worldly?"

But the Vivyans cared extremely little for the chit-chat of any coterie; they were too happy even to recollect that there were such

talkative and malicious people in the world as the Brabbles, Peppers, and Vallancys. Soon after his marriage Vivyan succeeded to his brother's fortune and baronetcy, and when Elizabeth became Lady Vivyan, and the mistress of a handsome fortune, she was deluged with civilities and flatteries by the same people who before were so busy pulling her beautiful character to pieces. Even old Mrs. Loquax was graciously pleased to forget that our heroine's brother had once been a scamp; and if Lady Brabble remembered the revolting fact that Elizabeth had acted as governess to the young Bonhams, she was good enough never to talk of it, nor did it in the least diminish her anxiety to push herself and her daughters into Lady Vivyan's circle.

The fate of Dawson continued a mystery for several years. It was Mr. Woodward's opinion that he had effected his escape in the brig commanded by the respectable Captain Dowse, but the brig was traced to an English sea-port, and, though several persons of sus-

picious appearance, and some who were known to have been Dawson's associates, were found on board of her, not a vestige of himself was discovered, nor anything to serve as a clue to his detection. Various other efforts were made with the same object and the same ill success. It seemed unaccountable; but after some time it ceased to be discussed, at least at the parsonage, except at long intervals on winter evenings, when in every family old topics are sure to turn up again, often for want of new ones of greater interest. Castle-Dawson passed into other hands, and was ultimately taken by a mad-doctor for a private lunatic asylum, a purpose for which it was ill suited, if the recovery of the patients was contemplated, but eminently fit, if the doctor's design was merely to make money, and to have his establishment as free from inspection and control as possible. It happened one day that Doctor Wilkins was dining with Mr. Spenser, when he received a summons from the coroner of the county to attend an inquest at Castle-Dawson. He

rode over there at the time appointed, not doubting but that some inmate of the asylum had come to a violent end, requiring legal inquiry into the circumstances attending it. But on his arrival he found that the case was one of a very different kind. The subject of investigation was a body, or rather a skeleton, which had been discovered in the subterraneous passage under the wine-cellar. It had been found at the foot of the ladder, which was all in a state of decay, the upper rounds fallen to pieces, so as to suggest the idea that they had given way under the weight of some one attempting to descend, and occasioned his death by precipitating him into the chasm beneath. But the first object was to identify the remains. They were produced before the jury, a hideous spectacle, without form or feature, the limbs scarcely continuous, the clothes in shreds and tangled with sea-wrack. Tattered, however, as the clothes were, they led not only Dr. Wilkins, but several persons present, to conjecture instantly that the corpse before them

was that of the wretched Dawson. A minute investigation confirmed this impression irresistibly. Amongst other things, a signet ring was found, bearing his crest and initials, which, joined to the fact that the remains were those of a middle-sized square-built man, like Dawson, settled the question beyond a reasonable doubt. The evidence which Dr. Wilkins gave as to the cause of death also confirmed the conclusion come to in the first instance. In fact the neck of the skeleton was broken exactly as in cases of falls from considerable heights. The verdict of the jury recorded their perfect satisfaction upon both points.

But little remains to be added ; yet, little as it is, our domestic chronicles would be imperfect without it.

Vivyan was faithful to the romantic country where he found his incomparable wife ; he loved it for her sake, and entered with zeal into all her benevolent schemes (now enlarged by her increased means of usefulness) for the improvement and happiness of her father's parishioners. Sir Francis pur-

chased the wild islet where he first became acquainted with the Spensers, and built a cottage of solid blocks of granite nearly on the spot where he and his cousin were startled by the apparition of the formidable curate peering down upon them from the cliffs. He also rebuilt the wooden bridge at his own cost and charges, instead of waiting any longer for the county, the government, or a miracle to reconstruct it. The Hoggs and M'Swynes improved visibly under the indefatigable tuition and encouragement which they received from their resident benefactors. No doubt a chapter of the Knights of the Thistle might still be convoked in the neighbourhood of Redcross; an ancient father or mother of the borough may still be seen perched on the house-top, to steady the thatch in a gale of wind; there are still dirty faces in the streets, and still a few lions roaring at the Celtic sluggards and terrifying them from honest exertion: but, upon the whole, advice and example have not been thrown away. Between the rector's

good-natured ridicule, the patient perseverance of his daughter and her husband in well-doing, and the occasional thunders of the Archdeacon, who frequently visited Red-cross and preached in his old pulpit,—there are not so many anomalies as when the Circe sailed on her *voyage pittoresque*; or as Carry Woodward said only the other day—“Things are not quite so Higgedly-Piggedly-ish as formerly.”

The Archdeacon himself did not reform his ways entirely. He continued to wear very odd hats and coats, and brandish extraordinary cudgels, for a dignitary of the Church, though he no longer glazed his windows and repaired his roof with his own hands. He attained no higher rank in his profession, but he got a better living a few years later, having a second time attracted the notice of the lord-lieutenant, before whom he preached. A few days after his promotion he was commanded to dine with the viceroy, and he obeyed very reluctantly, not being accus-

tomed he said to the "ways of courts, or how to talk to a lord-lieutenant."

"Just talk to him as you would to Carry," said the rector.

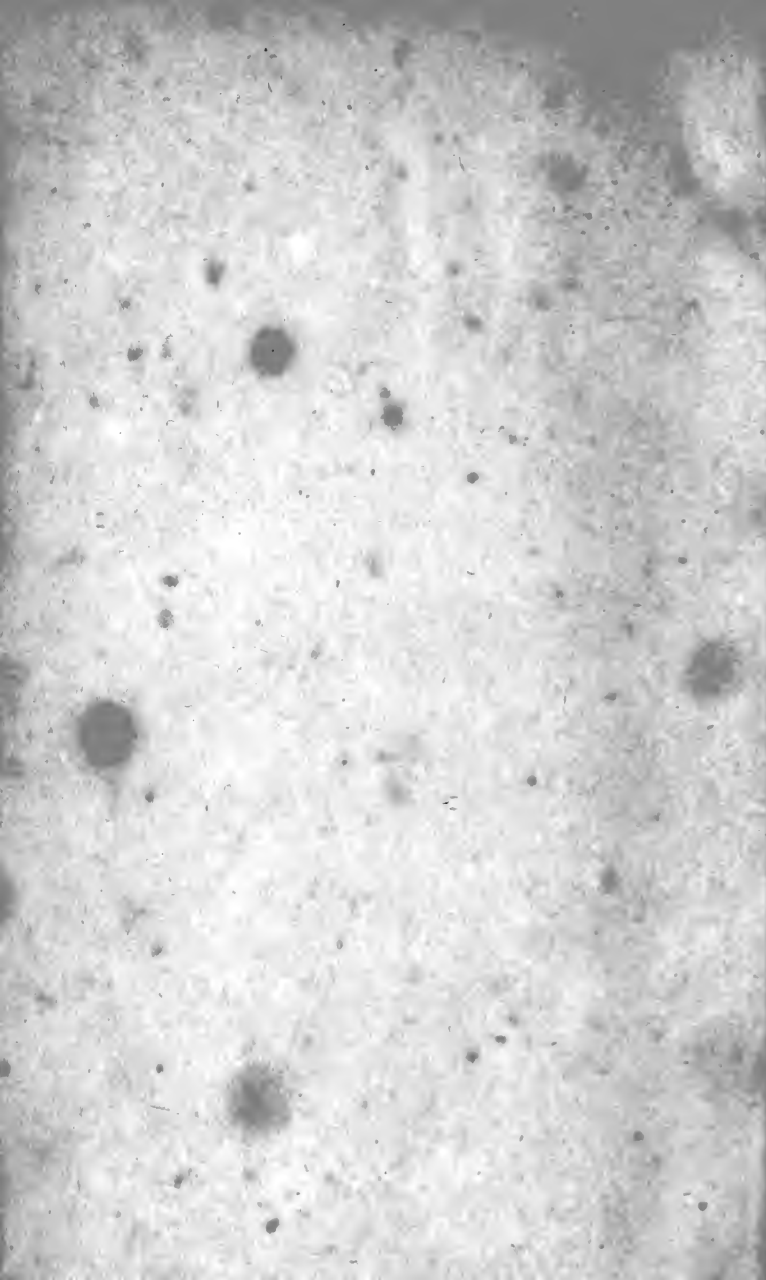
"Ho, ho," said Hercules, laughing as loud as when he was a stipendiary curate, "I say a great many things to Carry, which it wouldn't do to say to a chief governor."

THE END.











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